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Straight Outta K-1: An Authoethnographic Analysis of a Black Male Teacher's Experience Employing Hip Hop in a Kindergarten-First Grade Classroom

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STRAIGHT OUTTA K-1: AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS OF A
BLACK MALE TEACHER'S EXPERIENCE EMPLOYING HIP HOP IN A
KINDERGARTEN-FIRST GRADE CLASSROOM

by

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

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DEDICATION

To my parents, Vera Broughton (mother), James Anthony Broughton (father), Deloris Broughton (Step-Mother) and the Singleton family, Anastashia, Shiquita, Shakaisha, Dakota (sisters), Mildred Wigfall Green (heavenly grandmother) and family, James and Mildred Broughton (grandparents) and family, Charlie Sr. and Lillie Wigfall (great-grandparents) and family, Caldwell Sr. and Rosa Lee Pinckney (great-grandparents) and family, the community of Cross, South Carolina, my ancestors and every person who has labored and sacrificed for me to stand today.

To my Curious Cubs, Kindergarten-First Grade students and co-teachers, MISTER B still loves you and expects the highest forms of excellence!

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzed the learning outcomes of a Black male kindergarten-first grade teacher's usage of Hip Hop as an instructional approach using autoethnography as a method. The primary research question that guided this work was, "What can I learn from an examination of the experiences of Black male kindergarten/first grade teacher and students from a retroactive examination of the use of Hip Hop Pedagogy in a kindergarten/first grade classroom of African American children? Data sources for this study included artifacts (electronic classroom portfolios, videos of classroom instruction, archived teaching evaluations, parents' e-mails, student assessments, correspondence from administrators, lesson plans and reflective notes) amassed over the course of one full year (including summer school). Data were analyzed using open and thematic coding. Major themes were then used to create three vignettes, which captured the findings of the study. I triangulated data (Patton, 2002) to enhance the fidelity and trustworthiness of my study using two kinds of data: (1) personal memories/self-observational/self-reflective data and (2) external data¹ (archived teaching evaluations, parents' emails).

Findings showed that my conceptions of hip hop pedagogy evolved over the school year as I learned to position myself as a learner and to learn from students. I learned that I did not have to be the only person to perform hip hop and that students could lead the process, while also addressing learning outcomes of the curriculum.

Culturally relevant pedagogical dimensions were evident in my use of Hip Hop pedagogy (e.g., conceptions of self and others, conceptions of knowledge, and social relations).

Although educators can extrapolate from the body of literature in secondary settings and make adaptations for preschool and elementary school children, this research addressed the need to study K-3 classrooms that use Hip Hop pedagogy by examining the effectiveness, barriers, challenges, and insufficiencies of strategies and processes used to integrate Hip Hop pedagogy in a K-1 classroom. The findings of the study may be useful for: (a) understanding how Hip Hop and rap are defined in the context of k-3 classroom settings; (b) further understanding the literacies that children already possess from their communities; (c) acquiring more knowledge about young children's identities and its relationship to Hip Hop culture; (d) identifying the impact that Hip Hop culture (including mainstream aspects and music corporations) has on children that may emerge in the classroom; and (e) exploring the impact of teacher identity on instruction.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

It is 9:06 a.m. on a Monday morning and Mr. Edmond, an African American male teacher is holding a morning meeting with his class of kindergartners. “What did you do this weekend?” he asks each child. Malcolm, a 5-year old is selected to share his weekend experience. “We had a birthday party for my cousin and we danced all day long!” raved Malcolm. “It sounds like you had a good time with that music!” says Mr. Edmond. “Yea, it’s the music that we can’t listen to at school; the cool music!” says Malcolm. “What kind of cool music?” asks Mr. Edmond. “It’s Hip Hop!” Malcolm responds. “You should share your cool music with the class,” urges Mr. Edmond.

Many teachers like Mr. Edmond have used Hip Hop music as a culturally relevant teaching tool to support African American students in meeting and superseding national and statewide standards in their Kindergarten-12th grade classrooms (Emdin, 2010; Hill, 2009; Jenkins, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Long, 2011; Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2002). While culturally relevant teaching can take many forms and is not limited to a focus on Hip Hop pedagogy, teachers who experiment with Hip Hop music in the classroom are often seeking new ways to tap into students’ interests and “genius”, as Hilliard (1991) referred to it. That is, teachers who use culturally relevant and Hip Hop teaching methods often possess an awareness that their culturally and linguistically diverse students may demonstrate academic skills in their communities and homes that

may not be apparent to most teachers (Boutte & Hill, 2006). Many of these teachers have also used Hip Hop music in elementary classrooms to affirm their students' identities and to develop and enhance their literacy skills (Long, 2011; Ladson-Billings, 1995). Others have channeled Hip Hop into urban elementary, middle, and high school classrooms to teach science content (Emdin, 2010) and to make "academic" text more accessible to students (Hill, 2009; Long, 2011; Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2002).

Using Hip Hop music and culture in classrooms can be a daunting task for many teachers who attempt to effectively teach their students while also navigating possible barriers that may emerge from disapproving administrators, colleagues, and parents who hold reservations about playing Hip Hop music in the classroom (Simmons, Carpenter, Ricks, Walker, Parks, & Davis, 2013). Teachers who would rather not have to deal with such political complications (e.g., excessive unannounced administrative observations and complaints from parents) that often occur when Hip Hop pedagogies are used typically refrain from using Hip Hop music in their classrooms (Simmons, Carpenter, Ricks, et al., 2013). While avoiding conflict with administrators and parents is understandable, it is not without consequence (Gay, 2002; Ponciano & Shabazian, 2012) since it may mean missing important opportunities to invite Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CLD) students to express themselves in ways that are meaningful and relevant.

Statement of Problem

The primary problem explored in this study is that there is limited research on Hip Hop pedagogy in preschool through third grade (P-3) classrooms. Hence, research is needed to supplement the body of literature regarding how students engage in community literacies through Hip Hop culture (Kinloch, 2010; Love, 2013). While a large body of

literature exists on integrating music in K-12 curricula (Hale-Benson, 1982; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Long, 2011; Simmons, Carpenter, Ricks, et al., 2013), my search of the extant literature revealed only a few studies, conceptual works, and/or practitioner publications which addressed Hip Hop pedagogy in P-3 classrooms (Rando, O’Conner, Steuerwalt, & Bloom, 2014; Friedman, 2010; Long, 2011, Love, 2015). Although educators can extrapolate from the body of literature in secondary settings and make adaptations for preschool and elementary school children, there is a need to study P-3 classrooms that use Hip Hop pedagogy to determine issues related to young children. Such studies might examine the effectiveness, barriers, challenges, and insufficiencies of strategies and processes used to integrate Hip Hop pedagogy in these settings. These investigations may be useful for: (a) understanding how Hip Hop and rap are defined in the context of P-3 classroom settings; (b) further understanding the literacies that children already possess from their communities; (c) acquiring more knowledge about young children’s identities and their relationship to Hip Hop culture; and (d) identifying the impact that Hip Hop culture (including mainstream aspects and music corporations) has on children that may emerge in the classroom.

The National Education Association (2008) and Parlakan & Lerner (2010) acknowledged that when teachers play songs from student’s home cultures, they validate the importance of their students’ cultures and language. Since music evokes feelings, even in the absence of words, it can be incorporated in classrooms to support teachers in fostering the social-emotional development of their students while building relationships that connect students’ home culture (i.e., music) to their classroom culture (Flom, Gentile, & Pick, 2008). However, the dominance of Eurocentric nursery rhymes and

music played in kindergarten classrooms where Black students and students of color are challenged to succeed (Hale-Benson, 1982) raises social injustice concerns for these students because they are not afforded the same privilege (Johnson, 2008) of their White counterparts to experience, communicate, or have their culture reflected in their classrooms through the form of music and literacy that is relevant to them. This raises several questions. How have kindergarten/first grade teachers countered or dealt with social injustices like these in their classrooms? Are there kindergarten/first grade teachers who use Hip Hop, reggae, gospel, and other music familiar to Black students in their classroom? What do those experiences entail and what experiences led to their teaching practices? How is literacy defined in these classrooms? How are teachers dealing with the influence of how cultures are portrayed in society that emerges in the classroom? Is Hip Hop pedagogy incorporated predominately by Black kindergarten/first grade teachers or Black male teachers since they may be more familiar with Hip Hop culture? These are some of the questions that may be useful to consider when exploring the notion of Hip Hop pedagogy in kindergarten/first grade classrooms.

The lack of substantial literature on Hip Hop pedagogy in P-3 classrooms poses a problem because teachers who are implementing Hip Hop pedagogy in their P-3 classrooms, or those who do not incorporate or understand Hip Hop pedagogy, may only be able draw from a limited pool of literature regarding Hip Hop pedagogy in P-3 classrooms to support them professionally and personally. Without a substantive knowledge base to support the cultural competencies and skill sets of teachers, the students who embody and engage in Hip Hop may not experience the continuity or continuation of their community-based literacies (Boutte & Hill, 2006; Kinloch, 2010;

Love, 2015; Parlakian & Lerner, 2010) reflected in Hip Hop to their formal school-based literacies. Several works (e.g., Boutte & Hill, 2006; Emdin, 2010; 2011; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2002) have demonstrated how such bridging approaches are essential to promoting academic success with Black students unlike many traditional teaching approaches that have not worked in favor of Black students and students of color (Hilliard, 1995; Hopkins, 1997). In sum, further research is needed to determine if Hip Hop pedagogy in kindergarten/first grade can be a viable approach to addressing cultural discontinuities between Black children's homes/communities and schools.

A second problem is that while many researchers and educators are investigating the seeming absence of Black male teachers and the underachievement of Black students, more stories of oppressive schooling conditions (e.g., lack of cultural relevance in the classroom) told from the perspective of Black males are needed (Brown, 2009; Simmons, Carpenter, Ricks, et al., 2013). Thus, as a Black male kindergarten/first grade teacher, my story will add to the body of literature. Specifically, my auto-ethnographic study will examine what happened when I used Hip Hop music in my kindergarten/first grade classroom.

Research Purpose and question

The proposed study will be to retrospectively examine the processes and outcomes of using Hip Hop in my kindergarten/first grade classroom with African American students over the course of one academic year and a summer.

The following question will guide this inquiry:

What can I learn from an examination of my experiences as a Black male kindergarten/first grade teacher and students from a retroactive examination of the use of Hip Hop Pedagogy in a kindergarten/first grade classroom of African American children?

Significance of the Study

Given increasingly diverse classroom populations and a historical trend of ineffective education of Black and other culturally and linguistically diverse children (Hilliard, 1995; Hopkins, 1997; King, 1991; Perry, Steele & Hilliard, 2003), many early childhood teachers lack knowledge of issues of diversity (Boutte, 2008) and do not have adequate preparation to teach Black children and children of color in culturally responsive ways to their culture (Boutte, 1999; Gay, 2000; Gay, 2001; King, 1991, Ponciano & Shabazian, 2012). This possible barrier and lack of preparation of teachers has received national attention from the National Education Association (2008) and researchers like Gay (2001) and Villegas and Lucas (2002) who have noted the existence of a cultural gap, which is a gap between the cultural worldviews (perceptions, assumptions, ideas, interpretation, cultural modes of communication) of teachers and students that impact the social and academic outcomes of student of color. Broadening the scope of this problem, Bryan & Browder (2013) noted that there is also a gender/cultural gap between male and White female teachers and the diverse students in which they teach, which becomes even more drastic, when Black male teachers who comprise of one percent of teachers in U.S. public schools are added to this notation. This percentage also indicates a convoluted cultural gap (e.g., differences in cultural and gender perspectives) between White female teachers and Black male students since many Black male students are not likely to have a teacher who may be able to relate and

connect to them culturally (Kunjufu, 2002). These cultural gaps (disproportion between students of color and White female teachers) are problematically linked to a more significant issue, which is the academic underperformance of Black children (e.g., Among 4th graders, 53 percent of Black students scored below “Basic” on the National Assessment of Educational Progress test, 2013) (Ladson-Billings, 2006). Additionally, five percent of White students are suspended, compared to 16% of Black students, which illustrates disproportionate school suspensions and expulsions for Black students (Educational Testing Service, 2011; Holzman, 2012) when compared to White students. Likewise, the dropout rate for 16-24 years old Black students is eight percent while the rate for White students is four percent (NCES, 2014). Due to typical district policies, which promote “zero tolerance” practices, which often suspend and expel students from school for even minor behavioral issues, many African American students end up in the juvenile justice system and are likely to be incarcerated later (Educational Testing Service, 2011; Noguera, 2013). After “dropping out” of school or returning home from prison, many of these students--now adults--are at a severe disadvantage of sustaining and securing employment (Educational Testing Service, 2011; Wald & Losen, 2003), which presents a long-term racial and social injustice since they are often denied opportunities for self-improvement or upward mobility.

Thus, the significance of my study lies in researching Hip Hop pedagogy, an approach to teaching and learning through Hip Hop culture that literature has demonstrated as effective in fostering positive social and academic outcomes of Black children (Emdin, 2010; Hill, 2009; Jenkins, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Long, 2011; Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2002), which may counter aspects of the complex and

multidimensional issues aforementioned. Since Hip Hop culture is rigorous and has been shown to sustain the attention of students (youth), educators, music industry executives, and others globally (Boutte, 2015; Davis, 2015), it may be wise that educators, particularly early childhood educators seek to understand Hip Hop culture and Hip Hop pedagogy. To support the current knowledge base in literature regarding Hip Hop and Hip Hop pedagogy, this work will seek to expand the notion of Hip Hop in P-3 classrooms and early childhood settings. My research will illustrate what happened when Hip Hop culture was incorporated in my kindergarten/first grade classroom, and provide critical reflections of the implementation process as an African American male early childhood teacher.

Definition of Terms

My interpretation of the terms that I used in this dissertation to discuss my research are significant to understanding this study. The key terms frequently used throughout this study are defined below.

Break-dancing (b-boying/b-girling): I use *break-dancing* to refer to any form of street dance or movements with African origins that is used in Hip Hop culture.

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy: I use *culturally relevant teaching* to refer to a teaching approach that encourages both teachers and students to raise questions about structural inequities and injustices in society that impact all people especially people of color while promoting academic success in ways that make students proud of their cultures in the classroom (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Free-style: I use *free-style* to refer to an improvisational form of rapping in which hip-hop artist perform rap without prior written lyrics. Two or more artists who are

free-styling are engaged in a *cypher*.

Graffiti writing: I use *graffiti* to refer to any visual art form or writing used in Hip Hop culture to convey a message (Chang, 2005).

Hip-Hop: I use *hip-hop* to refer to an ever evolving spirit or consciousness fostered by minority Black and Latino/a youth in the late 1970's in Bronx, New York that manifests in the form of music, graffiti art, dancing, rapping, etc. across the globe. Hip-Hop is also deemed a lifestyle to some people who possess a more intimate relationship with this complex and ever-evolving culture (Chang, 2005; Tanz, 2007).

Mainstream Rap: I use mainstream rap to refer to rap music that is disseminated through commercialism by music industries. Such music is a product of the commodification of hip-hop music (Rose, 1994; Tanz, 2007.)

Hip Hop Instrumental: I use *hip-hop instrumental* to refer to an original form of hip-hop where beats, rhythm, and music flow in the absence of rapping.

Hip-Hop Remix: I use *hip-hop remix* to refer to the process of taking an original hip-hop song and modifying the lyrics, musical tempo, or dance movement to create a reinterpretation of the song for educational purposes (Long, 2011)

Hip-Hop Pedagogy: I use *Hip-Hop pedagogy* to refer to the various ways Hip Hop is used as culturally relevant pedagogy.

Literacies: I use *literacies* to refer to the divergent ways in which people are socialized to communicate, interpret, and understand the world in their cultural contexts (Richardson, 2007).

Literacy Skills: I use *literacy skills* to refer to skills that are necessary to develop

proficiencies in the communication and understandings of language (e.g. phonics, rhyming, alliteration, etc.) (Hill, 2009; Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2002)

Voice: I use *voice* to refer to a person's expression of their identity, ideas, experiences, opinions, and stories (Ladson-Billings, 1998).

Microaggression: I use *microaggression* to refer to comments or slurs that are made to a member of a minority group that belittles or marginalizes their culture (Solórzano, 1997).

Silenced: I use *silence* to refer to the dismissing or omission of voices, identity, opinions, ideas and worldviews.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

This literature review draws from two broad bodies of knowledge: (a) culturally relevant pedagogy and (b) Hip Hop pedagogy. In the subsequent review of literature, I lay a foundation for this study by unfolding my conceptual framework with an overview of key concepts, assumptions, beliefs, and theories that informed the study. I will also review relevant research on: (a) culturally relevant pedagogy and (b) Hip Hop pedagogy as a form of culturally relevant pedagogy.

Conceptual Framework

Conceptually, this study was guided by the basic tenets of culturally relevant pedagogy. Ladson-Billings (1992) defined culturally relevant pedagogy as:

(a) kind of teaching that is designed not merely to fit the school culture to the student's culture but also use student culture as a basis for helping students understand themselves and others, structure social interactions, and conceptualize knowledge (p. 314).

Culturally relevant teachers seek to sustain the empowerment of students in their classrooms with “culturally congruent” teaching styles (Ladson-Billings, 1995a, p.107) by building on the cultural skills, knowledge, values, and cultural accomplishments that children of color possess (Bourdieu, 1986). Culturally relevant pedagogy rests on the premise that students from all cultures bring unique perspectives, experiences, and knowledge that should be valued, understood, appreciated, and “bridged” to the

classroom in ways that are not only relevant but that are also liberatory for students (Boutte, 1999; Boutte & Hill, 2006; Hale-Benson, 1982; Moll & Gonzalez, 1997; Taylor Villegas & Lucas, 2002). In this sense, liberation refers to embedding students' experiences, interests and perspectives into the curriculum in ways that encourage students with the freedom to express their ideas, perspectives, and creativity while also experiencing academic success. The notion of a "bridge" metaphorically is used to represent continuity of student's cultural knowledge and experiences into the classroom; and is based on the assumption that there are strengths and values within the home cultures and communities of students (Boutte, 1999; Hale-Benson, 1982; Ladson-Billings, 1989, 1994, 1995a, 1995b; Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988; Villegas & Lucas, 2002; Wortham & Contreras, 2002). According to Hale-Benson (1993) and Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, (1988), teachers rarely capitalize on the cultural strengths that African American students possess.

While other terminology exists which describes culturally relevant teaching such as "culturally responsive teaching" (Gay, 2002) and "culturally sustaining pedagogy" (Paris, 2012), I am drawn to Ladson-Billings' (1995a, 1995b) conception, which emphasized the intentional and critical teaching of African American students--the student population in which I taught. As an African American, male, kindergarten/first grade teacher, I began reflecting on and analyzing my teaching experiences by examining extant literature on culturally relevant teaching. Table 2.1 summarizes the some of the major terms used to describe culturally relevant teaching in the academic literature.

Table 2.1
Sample of culturally relevant terminology

Terms	Description
Culturally appropriate (Au & Jordan, 1981)	Culturally appropriate practice employs interaction and storytelling styles of students' cultures as an instructional strategy.
Culturally congruent (Mohaht & Erickson)	Culturally congruent practice involves ensuring that students' home language is reflected into the classroom curricula.
Culturally responsive (Au, 1993; Au & Kawakami, 1994; Boggs 1985; Cazden & Leggett, 1981; Erickson & Mohatt, 1982, Foster, 1994,1995; Gay, 2002; Hollins, 1996, Irvine, 1990)	Culturally responsive practice involves using the cultural knowledge and prior experiences of students to inform teaching practices.
Culturally compatible (Jordan, 1985; Vogt, Jordan, & Tharp, 1987)	Culturally compatible practice involves connecting the cultural backgrounds of students with reading instruction.
Culturally sustaining (Paris, 2012)	Culturally sustaining practice is a stance that advocates sustaining linguistic and cultural pluralism in schools.
Culturally relevant (Ladson-Billings, 1992; 1995a, 1995b)	Culturally relevant practice is an approach to teaching that interrupts the status quo through cultural competence and critical consciousness development while supporting students in achieving academically.

I investigated the underlying assumptions and beliefs of these terms as I reviewed and critiqued the literature. I noticed synonymous and interchangeable usages of the

terms “culturally relevant” and “culturally responsive” in several works (e.g., Gay, 2002; Scherff & Spector, 2011; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). However, a key distinction was that the term *culturally relevant* was used by Ladson-Billings (1990) to describe a pedagogy of opposition, which operates counter to the status quo of more conventional teaching approaches (Ladson-Billings, 1995a). Culturally relevant teaching is described as an intentional approach to teaching and learning that is fueled by a teacher’s moral conviction (oftentimes shaped by their exasperation of relentless social injustices and inequities). It promotes social change through classroom experiences as students raise their awareness of their cultures (and the cultures of others) and socio-political issues while they achieve academically rather than through rote learning--i.e., memorization of ‘facts’ (Ladson-Billings, 1995a, 1995b).

I found the culturally relevant pedagogy construct compelling because like the teachers in Ladson-Billing’s (1995a, 1995b) study, I saw teaching as vehicle for social activism and felt a sense of passion for my role as a teacher. I enjoyed teaching in ways that empowered my students to achieve academically while embracing their cultural identities. Unfortunately, the contexts of many of my own K-12 classroom experiences did not support me in embracing my cultural identity because in order to “pass my classes” and graduate, I felt that I had to assimilate the white, middle-class, European perspectives, beliefs and norms. I was unable to identify with and make real-life connections through the conventional curricular approaches (e.g., rote-memorization) used in most of my classes. Retrospectively recognizing that I felt robbed of a quality learning experience because I was unable to apply what I was ‘taught’ to my personal development, I knew that I wanted to teach in culturally relevant ways to counter what I

experienced and to support African American students in my classroom in developing a personal passion and responsibility for their own learning.

Ladson-Billings derived the construct of culturally relevant pedagogy from a three-year ethnographic study in eight schools in a primarily low-income school district in Northern California. With intent to gain insight into effective teaching of African American students, Ladson-Billings (1995) sought nominations from African-American parents (whom happened to be all females) and principals in the school district for teachers who were “outstanding” teachers of African American students (e.g., low number of discipline referrals, enthusiasm students demonstrated in school) (Ladson-Billings, 1995a; 1995b). Eight female teachers from eight schools in a predominately African American were nominated by parents in the community and by local school administrators. Five of the teachers were African American and three were White. Teachers’ teaching experiences ranged from 12 to 40 years (see Table 2.2).

Table 2.2
Profile of teacher participants in Ladson-Billings’ (1994) study

Teacher	Race	Years of teaching experience	Grade level
Gertrude Winston	White	40	5 th grade
Peggy Valentine	African American	25	4th grade
Margaret Rossi	White	19	6th grade
Patricia Hilliard	African American	15	2nd grade
Julia Devereaux	African American	21	4th grade

Pauline Dupree	African American	22	4th grade
Elizabeth Harris	African American	31	2nd Grade
Ann Lewis	White	12	6th grade

The eight teachers represented a wide range of divergent teaching practices ranging from conventional to non-conventional instructional approaches. For instance, some of the teachers used Hip Hop pedagogy and others used strategies such as partnering with community members to teach curricular and cultural content (Ladson-Billings, 1995a). Data analyses yielded three dimensions that were common among all eight teachers: (1) academic excellence; (2) cultural competence; and (3) critical consciousness. These three dimensions distinguished culturally relevant teaching as a “pedagogy of opposition” (Ladson-Billings, 1992) or as a pedagogy that interrupts the status quo. These three criteria also served as the foundation for teachers who aspired to enact and embody culturally relevant pedagogy. Each of these dimensions is discussed in the following section.

Academic Excellence

Academic excellence and student proficiency levels are often measured by standardized tests (Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995a, 1995b, 1997). However, when academic excellence is viewed through culturally relevant pedagogical lens, it has a more meaningful, comprehensive, interdisciplinary, and culturally-situated purpose (Ladson-Billings, 1989; 1995a, 1995b, 1997). Hence, students who experience academic excellence are able to read, write, speak, calculate, pose problems, solve problems,

critique, analyze, refute, argue, collaborate and most importantly apply these skills to their everyday lives (Ladson-Billings, 1989; 1994; 1995a, 1995b). For instance, students learning about algebra in a culturally relevant classroom may be able to connect school mathematics to their lives by highlighting algebraic problems in their everyday lives to solve social issues. One of the teachers in Ladson-Billings' study, Gertrude Winston--a 40-year veteran teacher, explained, "Nobody ever really measures what the children really know. They have knowledge and skills that don't show up on standardized tests" (Ladson-Billings, 1994, p. 95). That is, standardized tests oftentimes only allow students to demonstrate what they have memorized or learned for the purposes of passing the test, rather than demonstrating how they would apply such skills and content in real-life contexts (Ladson-Billings, 1989). Culturally relevant teachers are more concerned with processes of mathematical thinking and getting to students to view themselves as mathematicians in their communities and schools, rather than convergent thinkers who 'do' math instead of use and understanding math in their own lives. Students who achieve academic excellence in culturally relevant classrooms are 'culturally healthy' (Ladson-Billings, 1989). That is, these students have cultural competence, which allows them to demonstrate their knowledge (e.g., academic proficiencies) while embodying a sense of pride, confidence, and respect for their cultural heritage (Ladson-Billings, 1989; 1994; 1995a, 1995b) in order to effectively navigate in society.

Cultural Competence

Cultural competence refers to identifying, understanding, and appreciating excellence like the values, talents, beliefs, customs, successes within the context of students' cultures, communities, and families (Ladson-Billings, 1995a; 1995b). It is based

on the underlying belief that essential knowledge also derives from these communities and students' cultures. All students benefit from becoming culturally competent, in terms of knowing their own culture as they, in turn, acquire empowering self-knowledge when they understand how their culture informs and aids them in understanding themselves (Akbar, 1998). Likewise, all students benefit from learning from the cultures of others because exchanging cultural knowledge and perspectives, prepares students to develop a global perspective that expands their knowledge, language, and customs in ways that prepare them to socially interact, work and impact society from globally perspective (NEA, 2012). However, on a more local, micro scale, as many students of color seek to construct their identities, they are often not exposed to the cultural legacies, perspectives, beliefs, values, and practices of their culture(s) in society, especially in schools because European American culture has systemically operated as the dominant culture (e.g., normalized through hegemonic leadership); which has historically positioned the cultural perspectives, beliefs, values, and practices of people of color as insufficient and inadequate (Akbar, 1998; Ladson-Billings 1995a, 1995b; DuBois, 1903; Hopkins, 1997; Woodson, 1933). Knowing this, culturally relevant teachers seek to empower their students by supporting the development of their cultural competence by centering the cultural perspectives, beliefs, values, and practices of their students' cultures as the classroom curricula (Ladson-Billings, 1995a, 1995b, 2009). However, to fully empower students, teachers must support students in developing critical consciousness (e.g., understanding the functionality of oppression) to challenge the systemic structures that make the omission of the cultural perspectives of people of color normative.

Critical Consciousness

Culturally relevant teachers understand that academic skills alone will not offer the support that students will need to survive in an unjust society. In order to continuously counteract the status quo and contribute as a critical citizen, students will also need to develop critical consciousness (Ladson-Billings, 1995a, 1995b, 2009). Critical consciousness refers to supporting students in interdependently understanding and critiquing the hierarchical and tyrannical organizational structures in society that maintains the power and the privilege of the dominant European American culture as citizens in society while they (students) also experience academic and personal success (Kincheloe, 2008; Ladson-Billings, 1995a, 1995b, 2009). When students engage in critical consciousness, they are likely to refrain from passively adopting textbook or information presented to them as ‘factual’. Instead, they raise questions and critique content from various perspectives (Freire, 1970; McLaren, 1989). Hence, African American and other minoritized students become vigilant about interrupting and addressing the plaguing social and racial injustices like racial discrimination, income inequality, and poverty (Anyon, 2005; Kozol 2005). This consciousness develops especially as they recognize their position within the context of local social and racial injustices, which includes inequitable school funding, poverty, etc. Culturally relevant pedagogy is used as a framework to support students in developing a critical lens and multidimensional perspective-taking in which to view and interpret their academic content (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Table 3 includes examples of each of the three dimensions of culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995a).

Table 2.3

Criteria for culturally relevant pedagogy

Dimensions of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP)	Examples
1. CRP supports students in experiencing academic success.	1. Using rap music to bridge student learning in a particular class of African American students resulted in students superseding local and state expectations for poetry related concepts (Ladson-Billings, 1995).
2. CRP supports students in developing and/or maintaining cultural competence.	2. Students develop cultural competence as they engage in learning concepts (i.e., economics, entrepreneurship) in the context of their communities. For example, students may learn the history of Black barbershops in Black communities (Boutte & Hill, 2006).
3. CRP supports students in developing a critical consciousness through which they challenge the status quo of the current social order.	3. Students develop a level of critical consciousness as their teacher supports them in interrogating and critiquing the racial and cultural biases in a textbook worksheet (Esposito & Swain, 2009).

Although there were differences in how some of the teachers in Ladson-Billings' (1995a) study addressed the three dimensions of CRP, there were also commonalities in their beliefs and ideologies from which Ladson-Billings (1995a) derived general tenets of

culturally relevant teaching. Although she found a continuum of teacher dispositions that were not fixed, three distinguishing features of culturally relevant teachers were their: (1) conceptions of themselves and others; (2) social relations; and (3) conceptions of knowledge. Each of these will be explained in detail below (Ladson-Billings, 1995b).

1. *Conceptions of self and others:* The manner in which a teacher views himself or herself and others whom they interact with informs their conceptions or beliefs of themselves and others. This notion rests on the assumption those teachers' perceptions of themselves and others inform their teaching practices (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1995b). Ladson-Billings (1995b) found that the culturally relevant teachers whom she studied illustrated their conceptions of self and other by:

- a. believing that all students were capable of academic success (p. 478),
- b. seeing their pedagogy as art –unpredictable, always in the process of becoming (p.478),
- c. seeing themselves as members of the community (p.478),
- d. seeing teaching as a way to give back to the community (p. 478), and
- e. believing in a Freirean notion of 'teaching as mining' (Freire, 1974, p. 76) or pulling knowledge out (p. 479).

2. *Social relations:* Social relations of culturally relevant teachers deals with the manner in which teachers build relationships with their students and their families through social interaction; which is an

essential aspect of teaching and learning (Ladson-Billing, 1995b).

Ladson-Billings (1995b) found that the culturally relevant teachers

whom she studied demonstrated social relations by:

- a.* maintaining fluid student-teacher relationships (p. 480),
- b.* demonstrating a connectedness with all of the students (p. 480),
- c.* developing a community of learners (p.480), and
- d.* encouraging students to learn collaboratively and be responsible for one another (p.480).

3. ***Conceptions of knowledge:*** Conceptions of knowledge refers to how culturally relevant teachers conceptualize knowledge. How teachers view knowledge informs the ways in which they teach (Kincheloe, 2008; Ladson-Billings, 1995b). For instance, if teachers view knowledge as something static, they often “deliver” knowledge to students as the bearers of knowledge (Freire, 1970) rather than collectively constructing knowledge with students. Ladson-Billings (1995b) found that when regarding conceptions of knowledge, culturally relevant teachers:

- a.* believed that knowledge is not static; it is shared, recycled, and constructed (p. 481),
- b.* believed that knowledge must be viewed critically (p.481),
- c.* believed that teachers must be passionate about knowledge and learning (p.481),

- d. believed that teachers must scaffold, or build bridges, to facilitate learning (p.481),
- e. believed that assessment must be multifaceted, incorporating multiple forms of excellence (p.481).

Although all of the teachers in Ladson-Billing's culturally relevant studies (Ladson-Billings, 1992, 1995a, 1995b, 2002) were female teachers, the narratives of teachers unveiled through the findings of Ladson-Billings (1992, 1995a, 1995b, 2002) resonated with me primarily because I could relate to their commitment to empowering their students as I interpreted their experiences through my lens as a Black male kindergarten-first grade teacher. Before becoming familiar with Ladson-Billing's CRP construct, I understood culturally relevant teaching as a marginal set of teaching practices that I should implement to be 'successful' teaching African American students. Ladson-Billing's (2006) article, "*Yes, but how do we do it?*" helped deepen my budding understanding of CRP because of the explicitness, intentionality and transparency of her article. Hence, over time I was able to reconceptualize my definition of CRP and came to understand it as a way of being (i.e., thinking and acting with intentionality and ethical conduct), and not solely as something that a teacher "does" to be *responsive* to the cultures of his or her students. I realized through reflection that I was one of far too many teachers who had fallen victim of 'jumping on the bandwagon' by passively adopting and embracing 'buzz words' (i.e., "the whole child", "evidence-based") in the educational field without critically analyzing them (King, 1991). Hence, I became the 'passive' teacher that I disdained, who claimed to educate 'the whole child' without fully understanding what it meant. It sounded 'good' to say that I educated the whole child

until I noticed that many of my peers were also using the term even though they were not meeting the needs of their students. Although national statistics have suggested that most African American students are not meeting state and national expectations as measured by standardized tests (Ladson-Billings, 2006), there are far too many teachers who claim to be teaching the ‘whole child.’ Through reflection, time, and experience, I realized that although most leaders in the school system also embraced such terms (e.g., diversity, individualized instruction, arts-based instruction) on school banners and documents, the teaching approaches in the school did not mirror the philosophy behind those terms. In essence, they only supported parts of the child (e.g., academics narrowly defined) rather than truly supporting the whole (social, emotional, intellectual, spiritual) child (Ladson-Billings, 2006; Noguera, 2008). I was also guilty of this. Conversely, culturally relevant pedagogy presents a sense of accountability to teachers since there are three propositions (students experience academic success, cultural competence, and critical consciousness) that must be met to support ‘the whole child.’

I readily embraced the term culturally relevant pedagogy for the purposes of this study in an effort to interrupt the educational status quo that normalizes the usages of such terms or concepts without warranting mirroring teaching practices and ideologies. This preference is guided by my drawing from the work of Ladson-Billings (1995a, 1995b, 2006), which is framed around African American students and their successful teachers; although she mentions other students of color while maintaining a robust commitment to teaching as an act of social justice. That is, teachers demonstrate social activism rather than only talking about social justice issues.

Critical Consciousness

Part of demonstrating social activism is creating spaces in which children can learn and also demonstrate social activism in the classroom (Friere, 1970). Such activism will require that teachers abstain from the ‘banking concept’ (Friere, 1970) of learning, in which children are not acknowledged as being knowledgeable or having perspectives, ideas, and information worthy of the teacher and students to learn from. Rather than speaking of unfair treatment to students, in classes where reciprocal teaching occurs, both students and teachers engage in dialectic conversations about what they can do to bring awareness and to respond to unfair treatment. Students are supported in developing a level of awareness of social justice issues around them and the language to communicate such awareness in various ways. One way of communicating social justice issues is rooted in the culture of Hip Hop. Hip Hop artists have historically used music, art, dance, and various other elements (Rose, 1994) to communicate social justice issues occurring in their communities. Otherwise, many of these issues and experiences of social injustices would be unheard of. Participants in Hip Hop culture are not only aware of or ‘hipped’ to the social injustices in their communities but they also ‘hop’, move, or take action in response to such awareness (Chang, 2005). Hip Hop pedagogy supports children in developing the critical consciousness that they need to identify social injustices around them (e.g., dominance of European texts taught as factual; omission of a variety of cultures in curriculum) and respond to them. Teachers can use culturally relevant pedagogy as a framework in which to develop the skills necessary to support the development of students who are not passive consumers (Jenkins, 2013) but are also producers of knowledge. The next section presents a review of studies which examined culturally relevant pedagogy.

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

Culturally relevant teachers conceptions of self

This review of literature explores how teachers have understood and used culturally relevant pedagogy with students of color. I begin by examining the beliefs that inform the roles and approaches of culturally relevant teachers. I also synthesize and analyze studies, which examined culturally relevant pedagogy.

Oprah Winfrey once stated, “You become what you believe” (Winfrey, 2011). Throughout our lived experiences we have constructed beliefs (philosophies) about various aspects of our lives (e.g., education, religion, society) that shaped who we are (our identities) and what we do (our practices) (Kincheloe, 2008). It is not until we begin to unpack or analyze our personal cultural histories, identities, and experiences in our lives that have shaped our beliefs, that we begin to understand our practices and approaches (Gay, 2000). Gloria Ladson-Billings (1995b) suggested that understanding ourselves as culturally relevant teachers is a prerequisite to understanding culturally relevant pedagogy as an approach and not a ‘magic’ teaching strategy to promote student success. We can further explicate this concept of culturally relevant pedagogy as an approach by inverting Oprah Winfrey’s opening sentiments to ponder the process of such an approach by inquiring, “What beliefs led teachers to become culturally relevant teachers?” In the following section I review literature that illustrated how the beliefs of culturally relevant teachers informed their conceptions of themselves and others; conceptions of knowledge, and social relations with students and community members (Ladson-Billings, 1995b).

Conceptions of culturally relevant teachers’ concepts of self

Most of the studies on culturally relevant teaching in the following review were framed around how the beliefs that teachers hold about themselves, their students and community members dictated and informed their practices and approaches to learning. Gloria Ladson-Billings (1995b) termed the impact of such beliefs that emerged in the narratives of teachers whom she studied as *conceptions of self and others*. Across the literature that follows, I will examine how the beliefs of culturally relevant teachers (conceptions of self and others) informed their approaches, high expectations, and effective practices for all children--particularly Black children. Ways in which these culturally relevant teachers manifested their beliefs and expectations through the embodiment of various roles to give back to the community through effective and meaningful instructional approaches for Black children will also be examined. Additionally, the ways in which self-reflection impacted their teaching approaches will be also be examined and synthesized.

Culturally relevant teachers hold high expectations for all students by holding students accountable for superseding those expectations regardless of research findings and statistics that forecast low academic achievement for many culturally and linguistically diverse children (Hilliard, 1991; Ladson-Billings, 1990, 1995a, 1995b). Indeed, many culturally relevant teachers question the ideological assumptions and methodological validity of such research and statistics. Instead, they often draw from their own teaching experiences during which they have witnessed the talents, knowledge, and abilities of their students through the positive relationships they have established. Culturally relevant teachers use the knowledge acquired from those relationships to develop the cultural competence and academic excellence needed to push and demand

students to reach their own full potential. Teachers who take this approach exude what Boutte (2015) and Lynn (2006) referred to as, “tough love” (p.144). These are often culturally relevant teachers who have developed a positive relationship with their students and conveyed their high expectations for student through a warm (caring/loving) and non-negotiable (“no-excuse” for failure) demand for student’s best performance and mutual respect.

While some teachers give their students “permission to fail” (Ladson-Billings, 2002) by not demanding students’ best work, culturally relevant teachers are committed to supporting students to reach their full potential. However, it is insufficient for students to only be inspired and empowered by culturally relevant teachers who make them “feel good” by caring and demanding their best (Ladson-Billings, 1995a, 1995b). All teachers (including culturally relevant teachers) are still expected to meet the demands of high stakes testing and high school graduation mandates (NCES, 2011). An African American female teacher in Esposito & Swain’s (2009) study explained that in spite of such demands and pressure of high stakes testing that student academic achievement is expected.

It’s [teaching] educating beyond just being able to graduate from high school and [getting] a job. [It’s] education that’s [going to] turn you into a critical thinker...getting knowledge for the sake of knowledge...Learning for the sake of learning...Learning because you want to, because you love to learn, instead of just having to. (p. 41)

Like this teacher, culturally relevant teachers believe that education should be framed as something in which students should take ownership of while possessing an internal

passion to acquire knowledge to aid personal growth (Esposito & Swain, 2009; Freire, 1970; Ladson-Billings, 1995a, 1995b) to be successful and critical citizens in society. From this perspective, culturally relevant teachers work to teach from a social justice perspective by negotiating power in the classroom through the social construction of knowledge with their students. Simultaneously, culturally relevant teachers expand and deepen their personal knowledge rather than the traditional approach of ‘delivering’ knowledge to their students (Boutte & Hill, 2006).

Interested in the beliefs that imbued upon culturally relevant teachers a conviction for social justice, Esposito & Swain (2009) conducted one-to-three hour interviews with seven elementary teachers (one Black American male, six Black American females) from different elementary schools. These teachers were identified by university faculty as having an interest in culturally relevant pedagogy. Each teacher was interviewed twice and also served as participants in a two-hour focus group. These teachers who held master’s degrees in education possessed a range of four-to-six years of teaching experiences. Esposito & Swain’s (2009) concluded that many teachers felt that scripted curriculums marginalized opportunities for the teacher participants to support students in developing critical thinking skills needed to navigate issues in their daily lives. As a result, the seven culturally relevant teachers (Esposito & Swain, 2009) resisted assimilation to the school norm of using scripted and prescribed curriculum by instead, using students’ cultural knowledge, perspectives, values, and worldviews to serve as bridges to the curricula.

Drawing from the work of Ladson-Billings (1994), the decisions of the teachers in Esposito & Swain’s (2009) study can be analyzed and understood by examining two

categories of teachers' beliefs: (1) assimilationist; and (2) culturally relevant. Teachers who are assimilationists are teachers who maintain the status quo by conforming to or assimilating to the norms, beliefs, values and customs of the dominant White, middle-class, male culture (Ladson-Billings, 2006). What Ladson-Billings described as assimilationist, included teachers who believed that failure was/is inevitable for some students. For example, assimilationists may assume that students from low-socioeconomic backgrounds will automatically perform poorly in school (Hilliard, 1991) and also view knowledge as content to be 'delivered' to students (Ladson-Billings, 2006). In the classrooms of these teachers, students are typically engaged in memorizing 'facts' about key figures in European-American history and their contributions and perspectives. These students can also be found completing class work independently and engaging in academic competitions with peers, while passively internalizing the 'facts' provided by teachers without critique or questioning (Freire, 1970; Ladson-Billings, 1997, 2006).

Conversely, culturally relevant teachers (like the ones in Esposito & Swain's (2009) study) believe that all students can learn regardless of race, socioeconomic background, and other social identities (Boutte, 2015; Hilliard, 1991; Ladson-Billings, 1990, 1995a, 1995b) and that knowledge is something that is socially constructed between both the student and the teacher (Boutte & Hill, 2006; Boutte, Kelly-Jackson, & Johnson, 2005; Freire, 1970). Although most of the literature regarding culturally relevant pedagogy focused on teachers in desegregated schools, Siddle-Walker (1996) found that Black teachers in a segregated Black community-based and parent funded school established in 1925, like other Black teachers during their time period, have historically demonstrated success with Black children.

The ethnographic work of Siddle-Walker (1996) provided a historical account for the work of Black teachers and administrators through an examination of archives conserved in the homes of local Yanceyville, North Carolina community members. Documents that were considered archived data consisted of principal's reports, local newspapers, school board minutes, a few school documents in a thin folder, and Southern Association of Schools and colleges accreditation reports. The 12 key informants (9 Black females and 3 Black males) occupied either the role of a former Caswell County Training School (CCTS) student, parent, teacher, or administrator supplemented the archived data by participating in open-ended interviews over the course of six years. Though each of their roles as informants were not explicitly stated, Siddle-Walker's analysis consisting of three rounds of coding (open-coding, thematic coding, and coding that resulted from follow up interviews) and produced a copious ethnographic accounting of the beliefs, approaches, and effectiveness of Black teachers in Caswell County Training School (currently referred to as Caswell County High School).

In the segregated Caswell County Training School (CCTS), Lucille Richmond an elementary teacher, did not tolerate student disengagement. Rather than 'kicking students out' of class, she inquired about their well-being and personal issues that may have contributed to their disengagement. Ms. Richmond's keen awareness of such problems led to her uncovering the root of student disengagement by listening to student concerns or issues and offering her support. Regardless of students' circumstances, Ms. Richmond along with the principal and school staff at CCTS held high expectations for their students because they believed in the potential of each student (Siddle-Walker, 1996). It was expected that all students were engaged in class and demonstrated their best work

ethic in spite of their personal issues.

Accepting responsibility for student learning outcomes, elementary teacher, Nellie Williamson (another teacher in Siddle-Walker's (1996) study), suggested that teachers must keep students on task and engaged in meaningful classroom activities. Her colleague Helen Siddle, another elementary teacher supported this suggestion by cautioning teachers that if they fail to ensure that students are engaged with tasks, students will conjure up their own tasks (e.g., playing) which teachers may not find favorable (Siddle-Walker, 1996). Therefore, CCTS teachers collectively took responsibility for holding students accountable for meeting and exceeding their high expectations in the classroom because they collectively believed in preparing students to become effective citizens in the roles of teachers, lawyers, or anything they desired (Siddle-Walker, 1996). Such commitment to fortifying students with the moral character and skill sets to increase their likelihood of a quality life (e.g., career, stable finances, house) were kindled by many Black teacher's stark reality that American society had no desire in educating Black children (Foster, 1998).

Mr. Leroy Lovelace, one of five Black males teachers amongst a total of 15 Black female teachers interviewed, shared this stark reality in the historical work of educational anthropologist, Michelle Foster (1998), and insisted that American society would rather build prisons than build and provide educational opportunities for all students. As a result of oral history such as the one provided by Mr. Lovelace and other community nominated teachers, Michele Foster (1998) copiously contextualized the lived histories and experiences of Black teachers like Mr. Lovelace. These experienced countered the stereotypical, deficit, and fictitious portrayals of Black teachers as sub-standard to White

teachers.

High expectation in the context Mr. Lovelace's classroom began with requiring and ensuring that all students were on task and active participants in class discussions. Mr. Lovelace's underlying beliefs that people are less likely to take advantage of critical thinkers and that Black people must become self-reliant informed his instructional approaches. Thus, Mr. Lovelace could never be found standing in the front of the class delivering lectures because he was fostering discussions with students, provoking critical thoughts, monitoring student progress, and providing ongoing support to students (Foster, 1995). Another teacher, Ms. Ruby Middle Forsythe, a native of Charleston, South Carolina and a veteran teacher of over 60 years provided insight that helps conceptualize the impetus behind Mr. Lovelace's advocacy for self-reliance of Black people (Foster, 1995).

Ms. Forsythe revealed that Black Americans have always encountered obstructive forces during quests for education (Foster, 1998). She noted that rather than encouraging and pushing children to reach their full potential, many teachers (Ladson-Billings, 1995b) simply placed them in special education courses. Ms. Forsythe suggested that White people feared Blacks surpassing them in education as measured by state and nationally mandated test. That is, standardized test data would illustrate Black children as scoring higher than their White counterparts, which may stimulate feelings of White inferiority. Bearing this proposition in mind, Ms. Forsythe abstained from being inoculated with the strategies and beliefs of 'experts.' For instance, children taught by Ms. Forsythe mastered their alphabets by age four and recited program scripts at three-years old. Regardless of the recommendations provided by 'experts,' Ms. Forsythe based her instructional

decision-making on personal and cultural experiences (Foster, 1998). Like, some teachers in Ladson-Billings' (1995b) study, Ms. Forsythe was experienced and adopted many customs in Black churches such as children having active, participatory roles like reciting scriptures and speeches before the congregation as young as two-years old (Foster, 1998). Having taught three generations of families, Ms. Forsythe was an 'expert' in her own right. Thus, her lived experiences informed her curricula and inspired her firm, yet positive teacher disposition (Foster, 1998). Through these lived experiences Ms. Forsythe more than likely bared witness to the lack of interest and refusal of most White teachers after schools consolidated to teach Black children; whom they also knew little about culturally (Foster, 1998).

In a three-year ethnographic study previously detailed in this review, Ladson-Billings (1990, 1992, 1995a, 1995b) was also able to explore and contextualize the underlying beliefs of other effective teachers of Black children who embodied similar expectations and beliefs about all of their students. Though she reported that all of the teachers held positive beliefs about their children and held them to high expectations, I closely examined the practices of Gertrude Winston and Elizabeth Harris to demonstrate how their beliefs impacted their culturally relevant approach. Like Deborah Fuller, an elementary school teacher in Siddle-Walker (1996) who stated "There's nobody who can't learn at all" (p.158), Gertrude Winston, a White 40-year teaching veteran echoed this belief by admitting that she had never encountered a student who was unsuccessful. This was because these teachers believed in the intellectual capacity and strengths of all students. Through interviews, Ladson-Billings (1994) captured Winston's beliefs that schools fail to integrate student strengths and that tests are the "worst thing ever" (p.50).

She noted that tests do not accurately measure students' knowledge. Rather than focusing only on test scores, which Winston knew was an insufficient measurement of her students' knowledge and capacity, she made a commitment to "releasing the geniuses" (Hilliard, 1991, p.33) by inviting community members to support students in identifying and applying their strengths across disciplines (e.g., math, literacy). For instance, Winston's welcomed a community member as an artist in residence to teach Winston's fifth graders the science behind baking a sweet potato pie. Ms. Winston extrapolated this lesson by supporting students in using math skills like measurement and creating marketing plans for the pies and concluding with a requirement that her students composed detailed thank you letters to the artists/craftsperson (Ladson-Billings, 1995a).

Likewise, Elizabeth Harris, a teacher in her 50's in Ladson-Billing's (1994) study recognized the strengths or 'geniuses' of her children through her role as a member of a church that some of her children also attended. Harris witnessed children demonstrating varying levels of competencies through their roles in their churches (e.g., reciting, providing church announcements, and holding church positions). Harris, a second grade teacher in a school seated in a predominantly White community, was known for effectively handling student discipline challenges, believed that since students demonstrated competencies in the community they could also channel those skills to meet other objectives across academic disciplines (Ladson-Billings, 1994). Her belief was that since children could recite scriptures and passages before a church congregation, they could also apply those skills to confidently excel in their classroom presentations. Since culturally relevant teachers are cognizant of the skills and competencies that their students possess, they hold high expectations and believe in the 'possibilities' of children

(Boutte, 2015). That is, they are open to the endless possibilities of who and what their children can become and also how well they will perform (Boutte, 2015).

Teachers who believe in such possibilities possess what Hilliard (1991) referred to as the *will* to teach Black children in ways that released their knowledge, talents, and mastered skill sets. Indeed, teachers' beliefs impact their teaching approach. Hilliard (1991) further substantiated the impact of teacher beliefs that undergird their will to promote personal and academic success through culturally relevant instructional approaches by detailing the *will* of middle school teacher, Mr. Shabazz.

Mr. Abdulalim Shabazz's audacious stance in his ability to work with all students led him to present his peers with a provoking proposition, "Give me your worst students" (Hilliard, 1991, p. 31). The underlying belief in the possibilities of all children (Boutte, 2015) compelled Shabazz to not only demand the best work from his students, but to also take a social justice stance by provoking teachers (his colleagues) to rethink their deficit thoughts of students, who he believed were 'geniuses'. Mr. Shabazz demonstrated to his colleagues that when committed to the success of all children, teachers could induce the birth of the talents, knowledge, and skills embedded in each child. Mr. Shabazz's success with his children countered and provided evidence of children's success that refuted the assumptions of teachers who disregarded such possibilities. In addition, such achievements of Black children refutes the dominant scholarship or master narratives framed from a white, middle-class male, perspective that positioned students of color (particularly, Black children) as intellectually inferior to White children (e.g., Murray & Herrnstein, 1994).

For instance, in *The Bell Curve*, Murray and Herrnstein (1994) ascribed

differential intelligence to racial groups according to IQ scores. They attributed low IQ scores amongst African Americans to environmental influences (e.g., parenting, prenatal nutrition). This reporting implied that African Americans were solely responsible for the conditions they endured that contributed to low IQ scores, rather than the social and structural inequities (e.g., social gentrification, racial discrimination barriers) fueled by tyrannical and hierarchal governmental structures that perpetuated them (Freire, 1970; Kincheloe, 2008). Additionally, arguments such as the one put forth by Murray and Herrnstein (1994) do not problematize test bias or methodological issues with the data collection and analysis processes used by the researchers (Hilliard, 1997). Conversely, culturally relevant teachers consider and challenge sociopolitical issues such as structural inequities and test bias (Foster, 1998; Hilliard, 1991, 1997; Ladson-Billings, 1995b) while maintaining a firm commitment to the personal and academic excellence of their children in spite of such reports (Murray and Herrnstein, 1994). Thus, Mr. Shabazz's (from Hilliard's 1991 study) success teaching the 'worst students' suggests that it is essential to offer counter narratives to disrupt the pervasive master narratives about Black intelligence. Without such counter narratives, teachers may not be held accountable for helping students achieve similar success because the possibilities of Black children may always seem impossible, unless all teachers hearken to such possibilities (Boutte, 2015; Hilliard, 1991). Nevertheless, many teachers continue to hold negative beliefs for students of color optimistic stance (Thompson, 2004).

Thompson (2004) contended that negative attitudes (low expectations for students) and beliefs of teachers inform culturally irrelevant instruction that consequently results in the victimization of children of color as underachievers. In the summer of 2002,

Thompson (2004) conducted an in-service training for teachers at a predominately Black middle school and also at three predominately Black high schools to gauge their attitudes and beliefs regarding Black children and the in-service they attended in which Thompson (2004) to shared research and strategies to support teachers in effectively teaching African American students. Thus, Thompson (2004) used a 34 item, four-point Likert scale questionnaire that garnered 175 teacher's (see teacher demographics on Tables 2.4, 2.5, and 2.6) beliefs about Black children and the their evaluation of the in-service they attended. Thompson (2004) concluded that 10 percent of the teacher participants believed that most of their Black children did not desire to succeed academically. However, 55% of the teachers admitted that they (teachers) needed improvement with teaching Black children although these teachers simultaneously claimed to be 'outstanding teachers' of Black children although there was no evidence reported by Thompson (2004) to substantiate the claims of these self-proclaimed 'outstanding' teachers.

Table 2.4
Teacher participants data based on race

School	Teacher participants	Anonymous	Black	White	Latino	American Indian
Middle School	30		0%	73%	17%	
High School A	74		5%	64%	15%	
High School B	52		4%	60%	23%	Less than 1%
High School C	7	1	1	5		

Table 2.5
Teacher participants data based on gender

School	Anonymous	Females	Males
Middle School		67%	33%
High School A		51%	49%
High School B		48%	52%
High School C	1	3	3

Table 2.6
Student data based on race

School	Black students	White Students	Latinos	Asian Americans	Other
Middle School	18%	7%	61%	13%	
High School A	17%	37%	39%		7%
High School B	18%	37%	40%		5%
High School C	21%	27%	49%		3%

Although 10% of the teachers attributed underachievement to children's disinterest in learning, 34% of the teachers linked underachievement to families and parents. Thompson (2004) explained that surface-level evaluations of student engagement may lead to incorrect interpretations by teachers since Black children are oftentimes covertly and overtly resisting arid and culturally irrelevant curriculums. That is, Black children may appear to withdraw and disengage from classroom instruction on a surface level, students may actually be taking a stance against their perception of teacher

ineffectiveness by protesting and resisting instruction that they feel is irrelevant to their personal and academic excellence (Thompson, 2004). Moreover, Thompson (2004) reported that some of the teachers in the study considered Black children lazy, apathetic, and disinterested in learning. Unfortunately, negative beliefs such as these can have a life-long impact on children as adults as shared in Thompson's (2004) cautionary tale about her husband school experiences.

Thompson's (2004) husband, Rufus Thompson developed an early zeal for reading from his Sunday school teacher. Later when Rufus entered a predominantly White school, there was an occasion when Rufus's second grade teacher should have awarded him a prize that she promised for reading the most pages within a two-week time span. Instead, to Rufus's dismay, she accused him of lying because she failed to believe that he had met the goal. This experience remained with Rufus as an adult and his zeal for reading was never rekindled (Thompson, 2004). Thus, it is essential that all teachers continuously interrogate their own beliefs to be more conscientious of their ability to have life-long impacts on their student (Thompson, 2004). Thompson concluded that the in-service workshop had a positive short-term impact on most of the participants. That is, two-thirds of the teachers agreed to continuously engage in personal growth and development in an effort to become more effective teachers. The importance of teachers' focusing on their personal growth and development and teacher expectations cannot be underestimated (Boutte, 1999). Factors such as ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, student achievement, personality, seating location, writing neatness, speech characteristics, body odor, or other physical characteristics, and a combination of these factors have been shown to affect teachers' expectations of students

(Boutte, 1999; Thompson, 2004). Drawing from the extant body of knowledge on teacher expectations, Boutte (1999) also suggested that teachers have higher expectations for children who are physically attractive based on their descriptions of beauty. Like Thompson (2004), Boutte (1999) cautioned that teachers must become conscious of the power (ability to robustly impact students) they have over children's destinies. While many teachers may begin to become conscious of what they say to children and how they say it, Hyland (2005) reported ways in which the words of some teachers could cloak racism. Hence, it is important for teachers to consider how race and ethnicity influence their beliefs and instruction.

Hyland (2005) studied teachers' beliefs about colorblindness and racism. She worked with 22 elementary teachers and engaged them in individual interviews, two focus groups, and numerous ethnographic observations. After data collection a discussion group about race and racism was launched in at the elementary school with special permission from the principal. Although there were initially 22 teachers who participated in the voluntary discussion, three of them withdrew their participation within the first few weeks for unknown reasons. The discussion group which consisted of 15 audio taped seminars offered teachers three graduate credit hours, and opportunities to read and discuss articles about unknown topics that they selected in large and small groups. Hyland (2005) transcribed four audiotapes from each seminar, weekly journal entries of each teacher participant, and teacher feedback from follow-up interviews with the teachers that filled gaps in the data. As a result of Hyland's (2005) interest in the ways in which some teachers demonstrated their beliefs about themselves throughout the seminars, she selected four teachers from the first part of the study to participate in the

second half of the study (see teacher demographics in Table 2.7). Five classroom observations and at least two interviews per teacher revealed the beliefs of the four teachers, Carmen, Maizie, Pam, and Sylvia.

Table 2.7
Teacher participants data based on race

Teacher	Ethnicity	Grade level/Area	Teaching Experience
Carmen	White	1st Grade/Reading	6 years
Maizie	White	4th and 5th grade	4 years
Pam	White	Learning disabilities	35 years
Sylvia	"White"	2nd grade	Unknown

Sylvia, a second grade teacher who was born in South America at age six, was adopted by a White American family following the death of her biological parents. Sylvia self-identified as White, although her seven other siblings who grew up with a different family self-identified as Latinas/o. She attributed what she defined as success to her ‘White’ identity and learned how minorities ‘should act’ from her White parents. Sylvia’s personal history and experiences impacted her expectations and beliefs about her students as conveyed by her rationale for not enacting innovative and interactive activities. She explained,

I would like to do creative, hands-on stuff, but these kids [Black students] just can’t handle it. If I try to let them work in groups it is not good. I make things a lot simpler for my kids than you’d see in a regular White class, or middle-class school. I try and do most everything with the class unless it’s tests. Then I’ll just read it and let them

give me the answer, but I basically spoon feed them everything and go through everything with them because they [Black students] just don't like to do things independently. It's too hard for them. They get too flustered by it (Hyland, 2005, p.444).

Although Sylvia rarely explicitly identified her students as Black, she used what Ladson-Billings (1998) and Giroux (1997) considered 'code words' (alternative words) for Blackness like poor, violent, uncaring, and dysfunctional. Sylvia's comments or suggestions during a discussion about a community mural that another participant, Maizie, a White, 4th and 5th grade teacher was creating, unveiled her beliefs about the local predominantly Black community. During a focus group, Sylvia said to Maizie, "make sure you include a nice scene of a drive-by shooting" (Hyland, 2005, p.445). Teachers like Elizabeth Harris, one of the teachers in Ladson-Billing's (1994) study would find this statement problematic because it marginalizes the strengths and positive attributes of community members and especially children. While Sylvia depicted Black community members as dysfunctional, Harris recognized the leadership strengths of children in the community by highlighting Black children's participatory roles in church as a reference to the excellence demonstrated in Black communities (Ladson-Billings, 1994).

Teachers like Syliva (Hyland, 2005) can claim to be 'successful' while holding racist beliefs that impact their instructional approaches. Furthermore, most 'dsyconscious' teachers (King, 1991) victimize and have traditionally victimized Black students for their 'underachievement' from their (teachers) perspectives although research (Boutte, 1994; Esposito & Swain, 2009; Foster, 1998; Hilliard, 1991; Hyland, 2005; Thompson, 2009) have demonstrated that negative teachers' beliefs and

expectations can be linked to low academic student performance (Berry, 2004).

Berry (2004) detailed an African American mother's account of schooling experiences that marginalized her sixth grade son, Calvin's opportunity to perform academically. Although Calvin achieved the highest level on the state standardized mathematics test in third, fourth, and fifth grade and scored in the 98th percentile on the Iowa state test that measured basic mathematics skills, the school counselor and teacher denied him entry into an upper-level pre-algebra 6th grade math course. Calvin met all of the criteria and was deemed eligible pending the recommendation of his teacher. Berry (2004) reported that without consideration of Calvin's record of academic achievement, the guidance counselor substantiated the teacher's decision because she did not believe that Calvin could pass the class. Although the race or ethnicity of the teacher and guidance counselor was not revealed, what we can conclude is that teachers' beliefs impact not only how students perform but also *if* they are permitted to perform¹ (Berry, 2004). "Educational gatekeepers" can marginalize the opportunities of Black American students by establishing such barriers influenced by what they believe about their students (Berry, 2004, p.103). Unfortunately, many students subscribe to beliefs that their teachers hold about them and consequently manifest those beliefs through disengagement and poor academic performance because they embodied the low expectations of their assimilationist teachers (Berry, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 1995b).

In Berry's (2004) study, he interviewed three seventh and eighth grade students, identified as Bilal, Darren, and Phillip (Pseudonyms) who reflected upon the teaching

¹ King (1992) defined dysconscious racism as an unintended, a covert, and nonviolent form of racism that becomes an uncritical habit of the mind.

practices of teachers in an urban southeastern school district. These students spoke of teachers who believed in their abilities; sharing that these teachers held high expectations for them, taught in ways that reflected their everyday lives (e.g., using sports to teach mathematics) and worked after school hours (e.g., weekends and evenings) to support them in achieving their high expectations (Berry, 2004). The experiences of these students suggests that when examining the nexus between teacher beliefs and student performance, it may be essential to consider how culturally relevant teachers view and understand knowledge, because their beliefs shape their teaching which impacts students' performance (Berry, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 1995a, 1995b). Ladson-Billings (1995b) referred to teachers' beliefs about knowledge as *conceptions of knowledge*.

Culturally relevant teachers' knowledge

Across the majority of literature focusing on culturally relevant teaching, what teachers believed about knowledge informed their instructional approaches (Berry, 2004; Boutte & Hill, 2006; Ensign, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995a, 1995b; Schultz, 2008). According to Ladson-Billing (1995b), *conceptions of knowledge* shaped the dynamics (various approaches to teaching and learning) of teachers' classrooms. She (1995b) found that culturally relevant teachers believed that knowledge should be co-constructed amid students, teachers, and their community. For instance, rather than teaching students to memorize 'facts', culturally relevant teachers did not subscribe to textbook information as the 'universal truth' (information that does not consider truth from various perspectives) (Ladson-Billings, 1995a, 1995b). These teachers leaned from their lived experiences and the cultural experiences of their students and community to construct knowledge. Across the literature that follows, I will explore how culturally relevant

teachers' beliefs about knowledge (conceptions of knowledge, Ladson-Billings, 1995) informed their approaches and instructional decision-making in their classrooms.

How and what teachers believe about the communities of their classroom students impacts their beliefs about knowledge (Hyland, 2005). Boutte and Hill (2006) presented case studies of teachers who used culturally relevant pedagogy in their classrooms that illustrated how their beliefs informed their approaches to constructing knowledge. For example, Mr. Hill, an African American male third grade elicited wisdom, knowledge, and guidance from barbers in local African American barbershops to support his students in developing cultural competence and critical consciousness while they achieved academically. He believed that the barbershop was a classroom in its own right because it also fostered academic content across the curriculum such as business, mathematics, presentation skills (language arts), barber knowledge (social studies), and human hair (science). Through his community and project-based approach, Mr. Hill offered students an opportunity to develop knowledge from within the context of their own communities (Boutte & Hill, 2006).

Over the course of four weeks, 15 male students (most from low-income backgrounds) in Mr. Hill's all male classroom visited 10 barbershops in which Mr. Hill carefully selected as those that were well respected in the community. Mr. Hill's decision to carefully select barbershops that were held in high regard by community members spoke to the level of intentionality he used for culturally relevant instructional planning and sociopolitical awareness. Through a primarily qualitative approach, the students engaged in historical research of the barbershops by observing, interviewing and videotaping both barbers and customers during and outside class hours, established by

their elementary school. Mr. Hill was able to support his students in developing cultural competence and, in turn, his students either met or superseded state level expectations on the state-mandated achievement tests. Students learned presentation skills in language arts and content regarding businesses in math and social studies. As demonstrated by Mr. Hill's approach of centralizing excellence (e.g., community-based wisdom exchanged through service) in the community of his students, localizing such knowledge began first with the belief that excellence and knowledge worth exploring was embodied within all students (Hilliard, 1991).

Another study, Schultz (2008) demonstrated how culturally relevant teachers used the knowledge constructed within and from the communities of children to support them in making a positive impact on their communities. Schultz (2008) was able to demonstrate how centering student knowledge and experiences in the curricula garnered positive academic outcomes as measured by the state department of education via standardized achievement tests. The fifth grade teacher in this case study believed that the "role of the teacher is to provide opportunity and space to students" (Schultz, 2008, p. 4). After stepping back and re-evaluating his role as a teacher, the White, male teacher encouraged students from the largest housing project, Cabrini Green housing projects in Chicago, Illinois to design a project that would improve an aspect of their community. Most of the students decided to replace their dilapidated school building. Although the number of students and the ethnicities were not detailed, through a yearlong effort, the students were able to accomplish this task collectively while concluding the school year with exemplary scores on standardized achievement tests; although they did not specifically prepare for the test. As previously shared, Boutte & Hill (2006) cited similar

student success when the teacher gave students space or an opportunity to become autonomous with a long-term unit on black barbershops in their community.

Culturally relevant teachers bridge out of class experiences to classroom instruction to support children learning school concepts in ways that are most meaningful to them (Berry, 2004; Boutte & Hill, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995a, 1995b; Schultz, 2008). Ensign (2005) referred to such experiences as “culturally connected” (p.414). While some teachers may perceive this instructional approach as one that can be effortlessly implemented, Ensign (2005) demonstrated that there are advantages and challenges to bridging out of school experiences to mathematics instruction. Although Ensign (2005) did not report much information about the teacher-participants in this study, she unveiled their experiences with implementing culturally relevant mathematics instruction with second, third, and fifth graders in two urban schools in New Haven, Connecticut. One of the teachers in the study supported children in mathematizing problems they encountered in their lives and had the class solve the life problem they created using mathematical skills (Ensign, 2005). Moreover, the types of conversations and discussions that children engaged in supported them in making sound connections between their experiences and mathematics. For instance, one teacher fostered classroom discussions about the cost of rent for different apartment complexes during a unit on money. Ensign (2005) reported that some parents of one of the classroom teachers also held conversations with their children on the topic to complete neighborhood link sheets that required adults to record and discuss experiences with math in the community.

Another approach that a teacher used was journal writing. Journal writing supported children in tapping into language arts to convey mathematical thinking and

experiences (Ensign, 2005). For instance, one child illustrated and wrote about a store experience in which they only had 25 cents to purchase candy for 50 cents. The children learned that an understanding of mathematical concepts like counting and money can be beneficial in the context of their lives in the real world. Similar to Foster's (1994) findings, Ensign (2005) noted that children in the classrooms of teachers who implemented culturally relevant mathematics stayed engaged on classroom tasks, scored higher on text publishers' unit tests, and were emotionally supported. Although these teachers used publisher-created unit tests to assess their children's mathematical knowledge, they did not use the lesson plans offered by the text publishers. These types of impact on children would differ drastically in the context of classrooms teachers whom Ladson-Billings (1995b) referred to as assimilationists; where the dissemination of textbook information took precedence over collective knowledge. Furthermore, Ensign (2005) reported that some assimilationist teachers and students experienced difficulties trying to formulate real problems they experienced because they felt that some of the examples were not 'real' math problems. That is, these problems did not mirror the problems found in textbooks or tests they were traditionally accustomed to (Ensign, 2005). That is these students had a narrow definition of mathematics that was limited to textbook knowledge.

Similarly, another teacher, Sandra Mason, a fifth year middle school teacher in the work of Tate (1995) envisioned student learning as an educational process that prepares students to solve problems in the context of their own lives (Tate, 1995). To achieve this endeavor, issues students faced in their lives informed Sandra's classroom instruction rather than only mathematics content (e.g., mathematics standards). Mason

was able to initiate this type of instruction through student problem-posing tasks, which has produced student created classroom topics such as drugs, AIDS epidemic, sickle cell anemia, etc. Over the course of two years, one of her classes worked arduously to close and/or relocated liquor stores that were in proximity (1000 feet) to their school. The students were able to apply their knowledge of percentages, decimals, fractions and other skills to solve problems they faced such as using measurement to explore local zoning regulations. Through such experiences, students re-envisioned the role of learning and positively used their mathematical skills to create social change. Mason best summarized her role as the culturally relevant teacher by comparing it to that of a ‘school bus driver’ who picks up the students from where they are and follows their directions to their chosen destination (Tate, 1995). Since culturally relevant pedagogy is not a destination, but a continuous process of learning and developing (Boutte & Hill, 2006), culturally relevant teachers maintain roles as lifelong learners to support their students. Teachers support lifelong learners by promoting student development in critically ‘reading’ (interpreting) the world in ways that positively impact their lives and the lives of others (Freire, 1970).

When children ‘read’ the world (Freire, 1970; Jackson & Boutte, 2008), they are engaging in inquiry-based scientific practices by analyzing, investigating, interpreting ‘data’ (information) to begin to answer questions about their lived experiences. Culturally relevant teachers are concerned with how students ‘read’ and communicate what they ‘read’ in the contexts of classrooms. For instance, culturally relevant teachers in the work of Boutte, Kelly-Jackson, & Johnson (2010) have captured the voices of their students through dialogic exchanges fostered by providing students with opportunities to ‘read’

(interpret) and respond (Freire, 1970) to their lived experiences and worldviews. Rather than only providing students with information about cells from the teacher's or textbook perspective, Kelly-Jackson (CKJ) a university instructor encouraged students to construct analogies comparing cell structures to objects or experiences in their lives. The students were charged with generating original analogies regarding cell structures, daily objects and experiences. The students selected a minimum of 10 vocabulary words to incorporate in their project. The students used magazine and newspaper images to construct cell analogies collages. This project encouraged them to depict a cell in a way that was relevant and meaningful to them (Boutte, Kelly-Jackson, & Johnson, 2010). This gave students the autonomy to share knowledge from their perspectives and worldviews. For example, one student created a cell analogy that used Christianity analogies (e.g., Using Pastor to symbolize the chloroplast). Boutte, Kelly-Jackson, & Johnson (2010) reported that students who typically experienced struggles with science were more engaged, achieved test scores ranging from 75-90%; versus the typical 60-85%, and increased their vocabulary and critical reasoning scores. While some teachers have demonstrated the positive impact of preparing students to 'read' the world, Boutte & Strickland (2008) have reported on ways early childhood culturally relevant teachers like Mrs. Jennifer Strickland have supported young children in 'reading' to develop their critical consciousness.

Boutte & Strickland (2008) reported on the successes of culturally relevant pedagogy in early childhood by illustrating the approaches of a White female, culturally relevant kindergarten teacher, Mrs. Jennifer Strickland (co-author). Mrs. Strickland was a participant of the Center of Excellence for the Education and Equity of African American

Students (CEEEAAS) (Boutte, 2015), which was a statewide initiative in South Carolina in which teacher and teacher educators worked towards effective education of African American students. Mrs. Strickland participated in readings, dialogues, and conferences provided by CEEEAAS, which in addition to her upbringing-helped shape her culturally relevant teaching approach and stance for social justice. Similar to other culturally relevant teachers (Esposito & Swain, 2009), her classroom mirrored Afrocentric imagery and worldviews such as images of African American scholars and college graduates. However, unlike the early childhood environment described by Durden, Escalante & Blitch (2015) in which teachers adorned the classroom walls with images without students engaging with them, students in Mrs. Strickland's class engaged in discussions about social injustices such as the disproportionate number of African American men in prison in Mrs. Strickland's classroom. Mrs. Strickland and the students explored this issue by examining and analyzing pictorial portrayals of African American men across different magazines (Boutte & Strickland, 2008). This type of activity was intentional and meaningful because children were actively involved in constructing their understandings of the concept rather than the teacher 'delivering' content knowledge (Boutte, 2015; Freire, 1970).

To provide students with support in language development and the development of cultural competence and academic success, Mrs. Strickland taught her children about 'Ebonics' using specific strategies that she acquired from Dr. Noma Lemoine's Academic English Mastery Program (Lemoine, 1999). With high expectations for her students, Mrs. Strickland required that her children also occupied the role of a 'teacher' as they presented aspects of their classroom morning activities before their peers. Children were

able to develop academic success and language development through their presentations. Students developed a sense of ownership of their learning when they were given the shared responsibility of their learning in the classroom (Boutte, 2015; Boutte & Strickland, 2008; Boutte & Hill, 2006). Mrs. Strickland supported the critical consciousness development of her young learners through literacy (Boutte & Strickland, 2008) similar to other culturally relevant teachers (Hefflin, 2002). Cognizant of the considerable amount of negative stereotypes of African Americans as portrayed in books, media and society (Hopkins, 1997), Mrs. Strickland used books about African kings and queens as a counter-narrative to traditional images of White kings and queens. Through discussions and conversations with her students, Jennifer was able to interrupt the status quo by challenging misconceptions internalized by her students. African American children are typically not taught their cultural history which dates prior to slavery in schools (Boutte & Strickland, 2008; DuBois, 1903, Woodson, 1935). Thus, Mrs. Strickland intentionally crafted a thematic unit on slavery using resources acquired from an *Educating African American students* course (Boutte, 2015). Through visuals, storytelling, and role-playing the children were able to grasp the social injustices of slavery while developing a joy for learning about African/African American history. Boutte & Strickland (2008) illustrated how culturally relevant instruction can also support young children in understanding topics, concepts, or information that many may traditionally deem as ‘too complex,’ or ‘not age appropriate.’

As noted in the previous studies, culturally relevant teaching is elastic enough to extend across many subjects and grade levels. Additionally, culturally relevant pedagogy is used by teachers from many different ethnicities. Judson Laughter, a White male,

teacher educator examined ways in which a social justice perspective on education was applied to the middle school science instruction of Amelia Adams, a White, female student teacher in a middle school science class. Adams solicited instructional support from Laughter, whom recommended her to utilize a science fiction text to hook students. The text that he selected was Derrick Bell's (1992) short story, "The Space Traders", which stems around extraterrestrials who arrive on the Atlantic coast to offer the United States gold, clean nuclear power, and other advances in exchange for all Black people in the United States to be relinquished to them.

The study was conducted at an urban, Title 1 school serving 825 students in a mid-sized southeastern city. The student population was comprised of 75% White Americans, 18% Black Americans, and 6% primarily Hispanic, in which 51% of the students came from low-income neighborhoods. Among these children were Adams's 25-35 students from five of her classes. Laughter & Adams (2001) collected and analyzed lesson plans, reflective commentaries of her instruction, transcripts of online discussion between Adams and her students, student work samples, observational field notes, and semi-structured interviews. There were two face-to-face interviews conducted by Laughter with Adams that lasted approximately two hours. The data were analyzed through qualitative microanalysis in which the authors sought to identify patterns and organize the patterns using Ladson-Billing's (1995a) tenets of CRP.

Adams implemented three days of instruction on the solar system using The Space Traders as the supporting literary text. Her instructional approach supported collaboration and critical consciousness development. Day one consisted of an introduction about bias in science and a question and answer period in which Adams

assessed student knowledge. On the following day, Adams read the first four pages of “The Space Traders” then engaged the children in discussions about extraterrestrial life. Adams supported the children in analyzing race-related issues from a critical perspective by having them reflect upon any experiences that made them feel that the Americans would choose to trade with the Space traders. Laughter and Adams (2001) noted that there were several teachers who assumed that Adams would face administration for pursuing social justice issues using such approaches (e.g., reflecting on race). Finally, on the third day, the children were arranged in two concentric circles to engage in a whole-class discussion about the book. The students who sat in the outer circle were silent and composed questions for the inner circle to discuss. The positions would be reversed at the midpoint of the class to promote more classroom inclusiveness.

In spite of concerns from some of the teachers that children would make racial and inappropriate comments in class, Adams believed that the lesson was successful although she was a little apprehensive and nervous during the implementation. Adams did not experience any issues with the lessons because she set high expectations for her students and they rose to the occasion. Generally, the class came to a consensus at the conclusion of the unit that the United States harbors racism (Bell, 1992; DuBois, 1903; Hilliard, 1991; Hopkins, 1997; Woodson, 1935), as it has done historically. Laughter & Adams (2001) conclusively argued that teachers should begin to see issues of social justice as a part of science.

Social relations of culturally relevant teachers

While the above studies provided valuable information regarding how culturally relevant teachers viewed themselves and their children and how those views informed

their approaches to constructing knowledge in their classrooms, an examination and synthesis of literature revealed that the social relations of culturally relevant teachers were also informed by their beliefs. Ladson-Billings (1995b) found social relations, which is how teachers build and sustain relationships with their children and their families as a theme that emerged across her ethnographic account of culturally relevant teachers. Teachers who have developed social relations with children connect with them in ways that support their personal and academic development (Ladson-Billings, 1995b). One approach to supporting such development, in which I will detail in the forthcoming review, is developing a sense of community in classrooms. In the subsequent review, I will synthesize literature that illuminated how culturally relevant teachers established social relations with children and community members to promote student personal and academic success.

Boutte (2015) observed Mrs. Folsom's enthusiastic and intentional teaching approach in her third grade classroom that transcended typical isolated, independent seatwork found in traditional classes (Foster, 1997; Ladson-Billings, 1995b). Mrs. Folsom developed social relations in the classroom by encouraging collaboration among her students (Boutte, 2015). She transformed ordinary lessons into meaningful, thrilling, and relevant learning experiences for her students. An example of such transformation is when Mrs. Folsom devised a collaborative yet competitive game called "Fast and Furious Math" in which both boys and girls actively participated. Rather than having students independently compete for recognition, Mrs. Folsom's students were able to collaborate, discuss and conjure up answers for the problems collectively, while remaining actively engaged. Such engagement was also sustained through the innovative and relevant

teaching approaches enacted by Mrs. Folsom. For instance, Boutte (2015) reported that Mrs. Folsom used the concept of a house to metaphorically teach students about place value in mathematics. She expressed to the students that the “place value house” could only accommodate three people (e.g., one person in the ones, tens, and hundreds and then a comma would be needed before going to the next ‘house’). While Mrs. Folsom was effective in supporting students academically she also supported them socially by empowering them in various ways. For instance, when students occasionally suggested that they feared tackling large numbers, like the millions, Mrs. Folsom replied, “Are you afraid of those numbers?” “The children (confidently, in unison) respond: ‘I’m not afraid of these numbers’ and solve the problem, placing the comma in the right place” (Boutte, 2015, p.156). As a result of Mrs. Folsom’s rapport with her children, they always rose to the occasion and conquered the math problems given because like other culturally relevant teachers (Boutte, 2015; Boutte & Strickland, 2008; Boutte & Hill, 2006; Foster, 1997; Ladson-Billings, 1990, 1994, 1995a, 1995b), Mrs. Folsom had high expectations for her students.

While building relationships in the classroom is essential, a life-long learner and 40-year teaching veteran Gertrude Winston illustrated the essentiality of also building relationships with community members (Ladson-Billings, 1995a). Winston launched a program that supported children in building relationships with community members as they learned from each other’s parents. Ms. Winston invited a parent to come to her fifth grade classroom for a two-day residency to teach the children how to make her delicious sweet potatoes pies. Subsequently, the children conducted additional research on information that they learned during the seminar. For instance, the children conducted

research on George Washington Carver to explore his work on sweet potatoes research and to extend the cultural knowledge affirmed in Wintson's classroom. Additionally, children conducted taste tests, in which they sampled pies prior to devising a marketing plan for pie sales. Although the students were engaged in a social studies activity, Ms. Winston supported the students in making mathematical and scientific connections to their project. What we can learn from Ms. Winston is that as a result of positive child-teacher-community member relationships children excelled at applying knowledge across disciplines in ways that made learning meaningful and relevant (Ladson-Billings, 1995a).

In a case study that used a similar methodological approach used by Ladson-Billings (1994), in which teachers were nominated by community members and school administrators based on what they observed as effective teaching, Ullucci (2011) illuminated how positive child-teacher-community relationships fostered academic success. Anticipating the value that others placed on standardized tests, test scores were used to substantiate the nominations, although the author did not subscribe to the notion that test scores was an adequate measurement of teacher effectiveness. Six participants were chosen between two elementary schools. However, to capture one teacher's culturally relevant approach to mathematics, a third year teacher, Jessica Mann's profile will be shared. Ms. Mann, a fourth grade teacher supported her students in developing intellectual sophistication by requiring that instead of complaining that they do not understand a math concept that they explicate what aspect is causing them confusion. During one of several observations that lasted between 45 minutes to 2 ½ hours, Ullucci (2011) documented an instance where Jessica required that students formulated a specific question to provide her so that she could gauge how she could scaffold them to a level of

understanding. Rather than allowing her students to give up she pushed students to work arduously as suggest by Boutte (2015) to collectively solve mathematical challenges.

Jessica engaged in an interview that was digitally recorded and transcribed between three and four times to garner information about her pedagogical choices. As a result of the coding method used to analyze data, Ullucci (2011) reported findings that addressed teacher academic content and teaching strategies. The ‘flexible’ teaching strategies that Jessica enacted such as allowing children to use illustrations, manipulatives, or written responses to solve problems (content) while being transparent in how they were conceptualizing the problem supported student learning. Rather, than believing that her students were too young to perform up to her standards, Jessica believed in the ‘possibilities’ of her children (Boutte, 2015). We are reminded once again that teacher beliefs informs the relationships they develop with children which impact children’s performances. To sustain such an impact, culturally relevant teachers should continue to learn from their children daily and reflect upon their teaching approaches, which includes evaluating the quality of relationships they share with children. Therefore these teachers find culturally relevant pedagogy as a continuous process (Boutte, Kelly-Jackson, 2010).

Through the continuous process of culturally relevant pedagogy, teachers can build fluid relationships with children by developing cultural competence (Milner, 2011). Mr. Hall, a 2nd year, White, male, middle school science teacher in a two-year study in an predominately Black urban school in Southeastern U.S. developed cultural competence as a result of developing positive relationships with his children (Milner, 2011). The purpose of this study was to explore a White male, middle school teacher’s process of developing cultural competence, which is knowledge of children’s culture. By analyzing

data collected from one to two hours of semi-structured and informal interviews during teacher lunch breaks, planning periods, and classroom observations that occurred once or twice per week, Milner (2011) was able to triangulate data to analyze the successes and struggles of Mr. Hall. Mr. Hall was able to sustain authentic and meaningful relationships with his students in ways that supported their academic success with ‘tough love’ (Boutte, 2015; Lynn, 2006) and as his students’ ‘other father.’ An example of such ways is illustrated in the level of accountability that Mr. Hall possessed for his students since he knew and understood his students because of his decision to meticulously observe and listen to their needs, interests, and perspectives.

After being labeled by his students as a racist based on their realities (what they believed a racist to be), Mr. Hall realized that building authentic relationships to truly get to know his students required that he demonstrated interest in students’ lives outside the walls of the classroom. Mr. Hall could have easily heard his student’s message as erroneous name-calling; however, he grappled with the issue and was transformed by listening to the voices of his students (Delpit, 1988). He wanted students to view him as a ‘real person’ (e.g., from a humanistic perspective) so he made an effort to engage in storytelling to share examples of his personal struggles with students to relate to their realities.

Oftentimes, teachers miss the messages that students are trying to convey to them because they only ‘hear’ their students rather than critically ‘listening’ to the voices of the students (Delpit, 1988), which may be communicated through their words, work, or behavior in various ways. Through a communal approach to teaching in which Mr. Hall encouraged collaboration amongst his children, he took on the roles of a father and social

activist. Milner (2011) reported that Mr. Hall saw teaching as an opportunity to “fight” for his students (Ladson-Billings, 2000). Like some other culturally relevant teachers (Boutte, 2015; Foster, 1997; Siddle-Walker, 1996; Woodson, 1935), Mr. Hall was cognizant of the negative influences and risks (e.g., drug abuse, prison, violence, gangs, death, self-destruction) (Hopkins, 1997) that his students faced and was compelled to fight back by teaching students effectively so that they would be able to navigate successfully in society (Boutte & Hill, 2006; Esposito & Swain, 2009; Ladson-Billings, 2000; Milner, 2011).

Although Milner (2011) reported that students revered Mr. Hall as a ‘good’ and ‘cool’ teacher, little evidence was presented to unpack student’s perspectives regarding Mr. Hall. What we can learn from Mr. Hall is that teachers do not have to be African American to successfully teach African American students (Milner, 2011), but they should possess an ongoing commitment to critically reflecting on how their identities and beliefs impacts their teaching (Boutte, 1994; Hastie, Martin & Buchanan, 2006; Lynn, 2006). Teachers should listen and critically respond to the needs of their students (Delpit, 1988) and be willing to critique themselves (e.g., question their actions and personal beliefs) and modify their instructional approaches in order to be effective (Hefflin, 2002). It is useful for teachers to first engage in this type of reflection to build positive relationships that support students in also being reflective to apply skills to solve life problems (Gay, 2000; Kincheloe, 2008) rather than solely what are considered to be ‘school’ problems (e.g., math problems).

In *Teaching Hope*, Gruwell (2009) amalgamated the stories of 150 anonymous teachers to illustrate their episodic recollections and self-examinations of their classroom

experiences. One teacher, described their relationship with children in their classroom as a “special one” (p.15). Having walked the same corridors and learned in the same classroom contexts, this teacher embodied an affinity with her children. Such an affinity was fostered by this teacher’s ability and willingness to view, interpret, and understand the world from their perspectives and through their lens. The children shared this affinity with this teacher because they knew that their teacher understood and empathized what it was like to walk in their shoes (Gruwell, 2009). Conscientious of some of the experiences her children faced, this teacher believed that they were the only person that some of her children could turn to. Thus, this teacher began their day with self-inquiry by asking themselves, “How can I fulfill my own dreams and those of my students?” (Gruwell, 2009, p.15)? From this teacher’s perspective, the impetus for such a commitment to building positive relationships with children stems from the belief that children are talented and should be supported in becoming their best selves. Furthermore the teacher suggested that as a result of many teachers lacking positive relationships with children, they are oblivious of such child talent and fail to provide children a ‘stage’ in which to ‘perform’ for knowledge (Gruwell, 2009).

Entering the classroom of Carrie Secret, a scholar and fifth grade teacher at in West Oakland, California, one quickly notices a “very spiritual” and “intellectual world” (Perry, Steele, Hilliard, 2003, p.152). Carrie Secret was one of the teachers whose classroom was videotaped and was featured during the Ebonics controversy in Oakland Unified School District in California that began December of 1996. Secret embodied a motherly relationship with her students and in some senses, a coach. Regardless of age, Secret never talked down to children. In fact she held all children accountable for doing

their best work, even though the school labeled them as needing special education (Perry, Steele, Hilliard, 2003). In her classroom, children were always engaged in meaningful and instructional games, arts, and the development of stories and essays in small groups.

It is evident that the body of literature on culturally relevant teaching is ripe with numerous case studies and examples from classrooms in P-12 schools that demonstrate the importance of strong relationships between students and teachers. Yet, differences have been noted between relationships of teachers and students at small versus large schools. For example, Noguera (2013) found that building meaningful relationships amid teachers and children was a key ingredient to improving high schools according to most of the students in his study. While 26 percent of high schoolers who attended large schools reported that their teachers knew them well, 92 percent of high schoolers who attended small school reported that their teachers knew them well (Noguera, 2013). Using surveys and interviews carried out across 10 Boston public high schools (both large and small) with 132 older children in 10th grade, Noguera (2013) solicited feedback from the older children whom he reported had an astute awareness of how teachers could enhance their school experiences to support school reform efforts. Some of the students suggested that teachers should be passionate and demonstrate respect in ways that they require their older children. Additionally, the students (10th graders) suggested that teachers should assess student knowledge and modify instructional in various ways when necessary (Noguera, 2013). To provide such an instruction, teachers must develop meaningful relationships with their older children so that they are aware of the various ways in which to communicate information to support their older children in understanding concepts. As recommended through other ethnographic accounts of teachers (Delpit, 2002), Noguera

(2013) suggested that a premier aspect of developing positive relationships with students is supporting them in believing in themselves by pushing them work arduously, persevere through struggle, and prepare for the future. In essence, teachers must genuinely ‘care’ about every aspect of their children to foster the types of relationships that children need to succeed (Noguera, 2013).

Carla Hawkins, another teacher of ‘hope,’ (Gruwell, 2009) whom Kozol (1991) characterized as a warm, passionate, and humorous 40-years old teacher at Mary McLeod Bethune School in North Lawndale, Illinois demonstrated the essentiality of building positive relationships with children to support personal and academic achievement. Recollecting a classroom observation, Kozol (1991) gave an ethnographic account of a combined fifth and sixth grade where Hawkins is initially found cradling an infant in a rocking chair as all 30 of the children in her classroom are engaged in activities. This infant, a younger sibling of one of Hawkins’ current students --a passionate, helpful parent volunteer whom Hawkins’ invited to participate in the classroom in spite of her economic challenges (e.g., lack of childcare). The parent whom embodied an ‘assistant teacher-like’ role held students to the same standards as Hawkins. For instance, when approached by a child who solicited her help with understanding the word ‘salvation,’ the parent supported him in pronouncing the word and provided encouragement by redirecting him to use his dictionary to decipher unknown words. She encouraged the child to be self-motivated and autonomous rather than passively ‘giving’ him the answer.

Hawkins developed positive relationships with her children by supporting them in building self-motivation, self-esteem, and interdependence, which is the responsibility to help one another (Kozol, 1991). For instance, Hawkins fostered collaborative learning

(like Mrs. Folsom [Boutte, 2015]) by seating children in ‘departments,’ which consisted of six children seated in six combined desks to form a ‘table’. Within the six departments children were found reading, engaged in math games, illustrating geometric shapes as a form of art, or studying careers of successful business leaders who began their lives in poverty, similar to that of the children (Kozol, 1991). When the children were asked to switch departments, Hawkins encouraged a child from each department to stay behind and provide an introduction to the lesson for their peers before moving forward. Hawkins understood that building positive relationships with her children required that she fostered a sense of community in her class. Carla Hawkins, did not allow the inadequate school funding or the poor, economic conditions of her school, which served children from neighbors with high infant mortality rates (e.g., 1,000 infant deaths annually) prevent her from providing optimal learning experiences for her children. She purchased nearly all of the items (e.g., science gadgets, science games, dictionaries, plants, dictionaries) in her classroom for her children. Hawkins’ actions suggested that going above and beyond or possessing a willingness to do whatever it takes to support children may be a factor in building positive relationships with children (Kozol, 1991).

While many researchers have notably examined and illustrated the experiences and perspectives of effective teachers who genuinely care about their Black children, Kunjufu (2001) shared his perspectives from his personal experiences as a Black male teacher. Kunjufu (2001) revealed that rather than focusing on teaching specific academic skills like reading and mathematics during the first week of school, his primary objective was ‘bonding’ with the children in his classroom. ‘Bonding’ for Kunjufu (2001) commenced with what Gruwell (2009) referred to as *Teaching Hope*; when he

empowered students with a sense of hope to look beyond some of their situations (e.g., low income, fatherlessness) that were used to label them as ‘at risk’ to development goals for their lives. Kunjufu taught ‘hope’ by inquiring about his children’s career aspirations and addressing them and having them address each other according to their aspirations (e.g., Dr. Anthony, Engineer Susi) as a way of empowering them. As a result, Kunjufu (2001) reported that his children believed in such possibilities and internalized a sense of hope regarding who they could become. Since Kunjufu considered his children as ‘stars,’ rather than adorning his room with photographs of White male presidents, pictures of children in his classroom accompanied pictures of famous Black Americans around the classroom. Consequently, Kunjufu (2001) recalled few disciplinary issues with children in all of his classes, which can be attributed to the positive relationships and a sense of pride in which he was able to solidify with his children.

The research of Wortham and Contreras (2002) reaffirmed Kunjufu’s (2001) findings, that teachers cannot teach children effectively without first developing a sense of pride within them through an examination of the pedagogical practices such as those of Margaret Contreras, a bilingual high school paraprofessional of three years. Margaret designed an ESL classroom at Havertown High, located in a small rural New England town for a small percentage of Latino students who were extracted from one or two classes daily to work with Margaret. Like Mr. Forshay in the work of Delpit (2002) and other teachers (Boutte & Hill, 2006; Foster, 1997; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995a, 1995b; Siddle-Walker, 1996), Margaret managed to leverage the cultural knowledge and personal strengths that her students brought with them into her classroom to ensure that her children felt welcomed, appreciated, and valued. Having experienced Latino culture

in Colombia with her Colombian husband and his family, Margaret's 'insider' knowledge supported her in fostering student personal and academic success in an ESL room that resembled the Latino home. For instance, in Margaret's classroom, the children participated in multiple classroom activities simultaneously which resembled some Latino homes, in which Latino family members and visitors could be in one room engaging in various conversations, cooking, music, homework, and other tasks with simultaneity. Wortham and Contreras (2002) referred to this interactional structure as spatiotemporal fluidity. However, Wortham and Contreras (2002) admitted that from a White American perspective, Margaret's classroom could be perceived as 'overwhelming,' which was similar to the perspectives of many of her White American colleagues. Additionally, many of the teachers deemed her closeness with her children as unprofessional; suggesting that she inappropriately meshed the boundaries between the homes of her children and her classroom. Many of the teachers further criticized Margaret's instructional approach claiming that rather than providing 'instruction' to her children, Margaret engaged in mentoring and tutoring in her classroom. Eventually, Margaret resigned from the school due to the criticisms and pressures from her White American colleagues.

Contrastingly, one of the research assistants of Wortham and Contreras (2002), a Mexican, described Margaret's classroom as "a home away from home" (p.139). In fact, in this 'home' (classroom), Margaret referenced herself as a "proud mother" of 'her' students" (p.136). This is evident by the gestures of students like Jesús, who presented Margaret gifts on Mother's day since she served as a 'mother' in the classroom, while his mother is away in Mexico for several months (Wortham and Contreras, 2002). Other

students confided in Margaret and trusted her as a guardian, especially new students who often refused to leave the ESL room because Margaret's class provided them with the familiarity they missed from their Spanish-speaking friends and culture (Wortham and Contreras, 2002). Although the authors (Wortham and Contreras, 2002) reported that several of the boys from Margaret's class did not succeed academically, they did develop a sense of Latino pride.

However, as a result of Margaret's resignation, the third year of the ethnographic study revealed a declination in ESL class enrollment (from eight children to three), students working independently rather than Margaret's collaborative assignments, lack of student work displayed, and declination of ESL student support. Essentially, Margaret's culturally relevant classroom turned into a traditional classroom that did not reflect the experiences, realities, and perspectives of the children's culture. What we can learn from Margaret is that success should not be measured solely by academic performance but culturally relevant teachers should also support the personal development (sense of cultural pride) of children in classrooms that are 'home-like' environments (Wortham and Contreras, 2002).

To gauge the perspectives and knowledge of children in classrooms of culturally relevant teachers, Howard (2007) cross-selected 30 students based on low, medium and high academic achievement and behavior. By engaging each student in one 30-60 minutes, tape-recorded and transcribed interview on the school's premises, Howard (2007) was able to delve into the perspectives of the children. As a method of triangulating data, which is comparing the children's responses to what actually occurred in the context of the classroom, Howard (2007) conducted two-to-three observations per

week, lasting 30-90 minutes per visit within a year's time span. Although teachers were not the focus for analysis in the study, to provide contextualization, four teachers whom the study participants provided feedback and reflected upon were identified (Howard, 2007). These teachers are: Vann James, a seventh year, Black male middle school teacher; Hazel Russell, a tenth year Black female fifth grade teacher; Louise Herman, a former corporate attorney-now first year fourth grade teacher; Dorothy Kelly, a twentieth year, Black female fourth grade teacher; and Marilyn Smith, a 15th year Black female elementary school teacher.

One salient and reoccurring theme that emerged during data analysis was classroom characteristics in which the children identified as family, community, and home-oriented (Howard, 2007). Essentially, the children conveyed that their classroom environments seemed more like home (Howard, 2007; Wortham and Contreras, 2002). To establish such home-like classroom environments, teachers implemented daily rituals and classroom traditions like sitting in a circle to share events and ideas, discuss issues, and bond as a classroom (Boutte, 2015; Howard, 2007). For instance, a student from Dorothy's classroom shared:

It's like a beginning of a new day when we have Morning Circle and when we say [the poem] "Welcome to Success." [To me] it means we are in a place to do our best. It's saying we'll all do our best in class and succeed...and I feel that we all will be learning something today (Howard, 2007, p.432).

This affirmation set the tone for the day in the classroom. This child's response conveyed that the morning circle was meaningful and impactful to their personal and academic success (Howard, 2007).

Another child, a fifth-grader shared that Hazel was like his biological mother because she set high expectations (e.g., children were not able to argue or to lie) and conveyed her expectations through what he referred to as litanies (Howard, 2007). Similarly, another child compared Hazel to her aunt, sharing that similar to Hazel, her aunt gave academic based litanies that conveyed her expectations for her niece to do well in school and achieve satisfactory grades. Essentially these children felt that their teachers cared about them. Howard (2007) referred to this *culturally connected caring* (p.435), which is understanding and appreciating the culture of children in the classroom by establishing high behavior, personal, and academic expectations for children, and embedding their knowledge, cultural values, and perspectives in the core of the curriculum. Like Ladson-Billings (1995b), an eighth-grade student from one of Vann's classes (Howard, 2007) differentiated the teaching approaches and actions of teachers who care and those who did not. The eighth-grader shared that Vann (also known as Baba Jones) inquired about their home life, things they valued and devalued, which were not practices of the other eighth grade teachers. As a result of such practices, the eighth-grader reported that other eighth graders desired to do excellent work in Vann's class because they knew that he cared. Howard (2007) contended that there is much that educators and researchers can learn about the schooling experiences by listening to perspectives, insight, and feedback of classroom children. Essentially, children also have a role in defining what constitutes culturally relevant teaching by reflecting upon their classroom experiences (Howard, 2007). Other teachers like Angel, a White female fourth grade teacher in the work of Parsons (2005) have reported similar success with fostering student personal and academic achievement in 'home-like' classroom environments.

In a qualitative study of 11 Black students and 11 White students in a fourth grade classroom in a school in southeastern U.S., Parsons (2005) reported that Angel experienced student success when she eradicated the ‘dominant teacher’ perspective to create a space or opportunity for student autonomy with classroom instruction. For instance, rather than independently and competitively learning spelling words, children in Angel’s class were found working in pairs and collaborating on weekly spelling words. This type of collaboration supported the development of their risk-free family-oriented classroom environment (Wortham and Contreras, 2002), where children were not apprehensive about making mistakes. The findings, which were analyzed from 2-hour unannounced classroom observations for several months and semi-structured interviews, reflected that students developed a sense of pride in their academic abilities in ways that bolstered their confidence to assist their peers in learning concepts. However, when a White male child, Joshua attempted to ‘assist’ Terrell, a Black male child, by correcting Terrell’s response to a mathematics problem, Angel informed Terrell about how that type of ‘assistance’ was not helpful to the thinking process of his peers. Thus, culturally relevant teachers are intentional in how they approach collaboration in their classrooms to abstain from stifling the learning of their students.

In addition, Angel did not single out or use instruction that was higher or lower than her student’s levels. She was conscientious about her children’s emotional well-being and developed a sense of community in her classroom. For instance, Angel implied that if one person in the classroom was hurt, everyone was also hurt. In addition to greeting her students daily with a smile and a hug that informed them that she cared, Margaret stayed with her children and never gave up on them until they understood the

concept (Parsons, 2005). Since Angel saw future doctors and nurses in her children she emphasized unity and respect in hopes of her children taking her philosophy and spreading throughout the world in their future occupations (Parsons, 2005). To Angel, as a teacher, she was socially responsible for her students with the intent of supporting students who would become successful while positively impacting the world.

Essentially, studies exploring the social relations of culturally relevant teachers demonstrated how teachers fostered friendly rapports with children without being their ‘friend’ (Matthews, 2003). The pedagogical approaches of four elementary teachers in four predominately Bermudian schools in Bermuda were examined through a qualitative collective case study conducted by Matthews (2003). Marie, a 28-years old White Canadian was a first year teacher who taught in Gordon Primary (a predominately Black school) was one of four teachers who participated in the study. Tosha, the second participant was a 30-years old Black female with three years of teaching experience and a doctoral degree. Dennis, the third participant was a Black Bermudian male who taught at Samuel Johnson Primary, a predominately Black school after serving as a police officer. Tiffani who was a 40-years old Black female with 20 years of teaching experience served as deputy principal and teacher at Cunningham Primary school, a predominately Black school. Matthews (2003) selected these teachers based on their commitment to CRP and written reflections and evaluations that he collected after implementing a professional development institute that focused on enhancing math instruction. Findings analyzed from transcriptions of 45 minutes to one hour audiotaped interviews and notes from three 90-minute group meetings revealed that the teachers sustained and empowered relations, built upon the knowledge of children, and fostered the critical thinking of children

(Matthews, 2003). In addition, Matthews (2003) conducted 12 observations of each teacher and observed their teaching approach in which he encapsulated in his study. Rather than coding his data for themes (isolated building blocks of understanding), Matthews (2003) coded for ‘facets’, which are different ways of viewing the data from various perspectives.

One facet reported from the study was the notion of cherishing the ‘struggle’ (Matthews, 2003). Struggle in this context is defined by a learning process by which teachers challenge students to accomplish a goal beyond their present comfort zone or academic level. For instance, for a math activity, Tiffani had children convert numbers written in word form to standard numeral form. When challenged to justify an answer, one of the children struggled for ten minutes until Tiffani permitted class support. Tiffani’s goal was to support children in understanding that they knew more than they believed. Rather than giving up on children and giving them the answers to problems, Tiffani demonstrated her ethics of caring by challenging her children to tap into their inner geniuses (Hilliard, 1991). Thus, Tiffani modeled how some culturally relevant teachers demonstrate that they care about their children by not making content ‘easy’ but also creating uncomfortable and challenging learning experiences for children with the intent of scaffolding and pushing them to meet and exceed high expectations (Matthews, 2003).

Black male teachers

Setting high expectations and scaffolding children varies in the classrooms different teachers. For example, A vignette of Carter Forshay, a first year, Black American male, fourth grade literacy teacher in an urban school district in California

illustrated how building and sustaining positive relationships with students began with teacher self-reflection (Delpit & Dowdy, 2002; Milner, 2011). Forshay was depicted as an eager and energetic first-year teacher who encountered a classroom challenge when some students responded, “I don't have nothin’ to say; why are you makin’ us write stuff?; writin’ is too hard” (Delpit & Dowdy, 2002, p.113) to a writing assignment Forshay gave. Rather than victimize his children for their writing barriers and disinterest, Forshay engaged in self-reflection to examine his own practice. Forshay began evaluating things that were essential in his life and found that vintage and contemporary jazz music were essential.

By identifying what he found essential in his own life, Forshay hoped to somehow foster a connection with his students. He knew that his students enjoyed music although most of them preferred rap or soul music, and sought to use music to help his children connect to writing (Delpit & Dowdy, 2002). Hence, Forshay used the *Blue Interlude: The Bittersweet Saga of Sugar Cane and Sweetie Pie* by trumpeter Wynton Marsalis because of Marsalis’s melodic characterization of particular ‘characters’ within in the song. After playing the song on a CD player, Forshay led the students into a discussion about the emotions of the characters and encouraged them to role-play the characters. They concluded the day with the children constructing character webs in which they would collaborate, collectively critique, review, and extend their webs into stories the following day. Although Delpit & Dowdy (2002) suggested that Forshay was not a ‘warm and fuzzy’ teacher, he conveyed his love and compassion for his children through his determination to see his children succeed in literacy. To Forshay, teaching was a social responsibility (Foster, 1997; Siddle-Walker, 1996) in which he knew that he was

responsible for his children becoming proficient in literacy because they needed it to become successful in society (Delpit & Dowdy, 2002). Although Forshay was a Black American man who taught Black American students, he was not considered an “automatic in” with students (Delpit & Dowdy, 2002, p.118). That is, his social class, having been reared by a mother who was a teacher and a father who was an engineer and having graduated from an ‘elite’ private university, caused him to not fit into the social norms of Black men from the perspectives of his children. In fact, the children perceived Forshay as a nerd because he did not ‘talk’ like or wear ‘cool’ clothes like men in their neighborhoods (Delpit & Dowdy, 2002). Instead, Delpit & Dowdy (2002) reported that “As an African American man he felt an obligation to present an image of African American maleness beyond that of the hip-hop rapper or gang banger” (p.119). Forshay’s position as a Black man did not automatically warrant positive relationships with his children; rather, it was his unwavering commitment to supporting the personal and literacy development of his children through meaningful academic experiences as a result of his self-examination of his teaching practices (Delpit & Dowdy, 2002).

Using portraiture, a qualitative research method that blends art and science, Lynn (2006) captured the teaching practices of three Black American, male teachers in a large urban school district in southern California. Lynn (2006) sought to provide political and emotional contexts from Black male teacher perspectives to contribute to the literature regarding CRP that have traditionally covered the teaching practices of primarily female teachers. Each teacher selected from either an elementary, middle, or high school had to be full-time teachers who engaged in culturally relevant practices. The three teachers selected were Mr. Jamison, a 38-years old, second grade teacher with five years of

teaching experience; Mr. Kashari, a 27-years old, eighth grade English special education with four years teaching experience; and Mr. Imani, a 54-year old high school history teacher with 20 years teaching experience (Lynn, 2006).

Lynn (2006) used portraiture to demonstrate how the lived experiences of teachers like Mr. Kashari shaped and impacted their teaching approaches. While there are many children who go unacknowledged by many of their teachers, Lynn (2006) noted that Mr. Kashari made a firm commitment to convey his love, respect, and value for his children by consistently greeting them in the morning and articulating his appreciation for their presence in his class. Rather than simply enacting traditional curriculum provided by the school district, Mr. Kashari strove for his instruction to be what he called, “2000 relevant” (Lynn, 2006). That is, the type of instruction that he felt students could make personal connections with in the year of 2000. Moreover, Mr. Kashari suggested that although some materials like the book/play *Raisin in the sun* (Hansberry, 1959) are culturally relevant, they may be out of date and therefore irrelevant to the children in his classroom (Lynn, 2006). Therefore, Mr. Kashari used poems and literature such as a poem about a young man who poetically conveyed his desire to become a better person which the children could relate to. Mr. Kashari extrapolated this poem by having children engage in introspection about how the poem related to them. As a result, one of his students shared her deep introspection and connection to the poem by sharing about her complex family experience with five siblings who she helps her family rear. Since the author of the poem sought to convey the responsibility that he had to himself and his family, Mr. Kashari used this to empower his students and teach them about personal

responsibility that people have to others to promote emotional well-being children (Lynn, 2006).

Similar to Mr. Forshay in the work of Delpit (2002) and other teachers (Foster, 1997; Siddle-Walker, 1996), the impetus behind Mr. Kashari's curricular approaches to promote the emotional well-being of his children is the lessons that he learned from personal life experiences. While Mr. Forshay used his image to showcase a positive example of Black men for his children (Delpit, 2002), Mr. Kashari used his personal story to narrate how and why he became a positive Black male role-model. Mr. Kashari expressed to his students that he was once a former gang member and drug dealer and cautioned them of the dangers of such activity. For instance, after some children in class shared about a man they knew who the news reported was killed, Mr. Kashari acknowledged that the man was his 'homey' (slang for friend). Thus, because of such experiences, it was clear that Mr. Kashari, like some other teachers (Foster, 1997; Siddle-Walker, 1996), knew and understood the future consequences that his students could face if he did not embed life changing and life-saving philosophies into his classroom instruction.

Five African American male teachers held similar stances in regard to instilling philosophies into their students and were committed to social justice in their classrooms (Brown, 2011). Using ethnographic interviews, Brown (2011) illustrated the divergence of experiences of the five African American male teachers that challenges notions that essentialize African American males as one-dimensional and monolithic. The five male teachers Baba King, Baba Gossett, Baba Delaney, Baba Gaines, and Baba Parker ranged from 25-53 years of age and teaching experiences ranged from 5-20 years. These teachers

were selected using purposeful sampling from public schools in a large urban district which were amongst the few that had the high populations of African American male teacher. The study found that the philosophies and knowledge of the five teachers were informed by their individual experiences and affiliations with either Black fraternities, Christianity, Hip Hop culture, military, or martial arts. For instance, one of the teachers Baba Delaney's philosophy and practices were informed by his membership in a Black fraternity, Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Incorporated. An ethnographic interview conducted by Brown (2011) revealed that values, accomplishments, and morals of the founders of Baba Delaney's fraternity informed his philosophy, which informed his practices.

Conclusion

Teachers who enact culturally relevant pedagogy subscribe to the foundational belief that all children can succeed regardless of their gender, race, ethnic background, or socio-economic status; if they committedly work arduously to achieve it (Boutte, 1999; Boutte, 2015). As a result of this foundational belief, teachers hold students accountable by demanding their best work while pushing students beyond their comfort zone to support them in becoming socio-politically conscious intellectuals (Boutte 2015; Foster, 1998; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995a, 1995b; Siddle-Walker, 1996). When students know that their teachers endorse their possibilities to embody and evoke excellence, they are able to foster meaningful and sustainable relationships with their teachers in ways that promote optimal learning experiences (Wortham & Contreras, 2002; Kunjufu, 2001). However, such relationships are not automatically granted to teachers who embody the same racial background and gender of their students (Delpit & Dowdy, 2002). Rather, it is earned through establishing mutual teacher/student respect as a result of the manner in

which teachers positively manifest positive beliefs of themselves and others, knowledge, and social relations (Ladson-Billings, 1995b). Consequently, teachers and students are able to learn from one another in ways that support teachers in fostering ‘home-like,’ yet challenging classroom environments (Howard, 2007; Wortham and Contreras, 2002) that make academic success and student development of cultural competence and critical conscious possible. Teachers who accomplish this endeavor, understand that their classrooms are not static, but rather an ever-changing and evolving reflection of the students whom they nurture (Hefflin, 2002). Thus, teachers continuously reflect upon their practices to modify and adjust their culturally relevant classroom curricula and pedagogical approaches to reflect the values, cultures, and interests of their students in which they gain a deeper understanding as life long learners (Delpit & Dowdy, 2002; Hefflin, 2002).

Similarly, knowledge regarding culturally relevant pedagogy is not static; but ever-evolving as well (Boutte & Kelly-Jackson, 2010). As classrooms become increasingly diverse in our rapidly changing world, the approaches of culturally relevant teachers will also change to effectively teach and empower all students (Lynn, 2006). Thus, all teachers will not approach culturally relevant pedagogy in the same manner; nor will culturally relevant pedagogy look the same in every classroom; because of the intricate differences in student populations from classroom-to-classroom and school-to-school (Boutte & Hill, 2006; Esposito & Swain, 2009; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995a, 1995b, 2000; Milner, 2011). For instance, how elementary, middle, and high school teachers approach culturally relevant pedagogy will look differently in the contexts of early childhood settings because of the varying approaches that teachers take to scaffold

children in understanding complex subjects (e.g., racial and gender bias) and concepts (Boutte, 2015). Moreover, the approaches of female teachers who dominant the teaching force may differ from the ways in which male teachers approach culturally relevant pedagogy in their classrooms because of varying perspectives granted as a result of embodying a specific gender (Lynn, 2006).

Teachers may benefit from learning about culturally relevant pedagogy from different perspectives in different contexts to abstain from enacting a one-size-fits all approach to culturally relevant pedagogy. Therefore, I offer my study—my story as a Black male kindergarten/first grade teacher to contribute to the pool of knowledge regarding culturally relevant pedagogy in an urban, child development center. My study will grant readers ‘inside’ access into the continuous process (Boutte & Kelly-Jackson, 2010) that informed my culturally relevant teaching approach. By exploring my conceptions of self and others, conceptions of knowledge, and social relations (Ladson-Billings, 199b) as a Black male kindergarten/first grade teacher, this study will provide another perspective of the possibilities of African American children by detailing my learning experiences as result of enacting culturally relevant pedagogy. We have much to learn not from narratives that detail such experiences, but also who is telling it and from what perspective they are telling it (Ladson-Billings, 2006). Thus, I present my study as my story rather than risking having another researcher or historian insufficiently encapsulate or diminish the power of stories told by people who have been historically and traditionally marginalized and oppressed (DuBois, 1903; Woodson, 1935).

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

“Until lions have their own historians, tales of the hunt shall always glorify the hunter”

-African Proverb

In this chapter I will explicate the methodology used to address the research question by detailing the rationale for the research design (autoethnography), the processes by which I collected and analyzed the data, and contextual and participant information. This study examined my experiences fostering Hip Hop pedagogy as a Black male kindergarten/first grade teacher. This dissertation methodology was qualitative in nature. The opening African proverb in this chapter reminds us that we have much to learn from who is telling the story and from what perspective they are telling it. This quote evoked memories of what Chimamanda Nozi Adichei (2009, July) named as “the danger of a single story.” Oftentimes the stories or perspectives of people of color, people of the African diaspora (Dubois, 1903; Perry, Steele, & Hilliard, 2003; Woodson, 1935), African American teachers (Ladson-Billings, 1995), African American male teachers (Simmons, Carpenter, Ricks, et al., 2013) and African American students (Copenhaver, 2000) remain unheard in mainstream conversations concerning education. In many instances research regarding the schooling experiences of African American students tells only part of the story by primarily highlighting the academic performance or underperformance of students and not the experiences and teaching

approaches that contributed to these outcomes (Hilliard, 1991; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Noguera, 2009).

Metaphorically, the process of learning and believing the negative ‘single story’ about Africans (lions) that have been traditionally and historically told by the hunters (European colonizers) has resulted in Black people not knowing our own stories (DuBois, 1903; Woodson, 1933). For instance, as a result, Hip Hop pedagogy can be misrepresented and framed from deficit (Hip Hop pedagogy as only rap) and/or negative perspectives (Focusing only on negative gangsta rap lyrics) based upon who is telling the story about Hip Hop pedagogy. The manner in which Hip Hop pedagogy is framed in research oftentimes guide the interpretations, practices and decision-making of teachers. Teachers who read academic literature or who are familiar with narratives which frame Hip Hop from a deficit perspective may misappropriate, misuse, or underuse Hip Hop pedagogy (e.g., only using Hip Hop ‘music’ in classrooms on Fridays). Knowing this danger and such implications to the presentation of Hip Hop pedagogy in research, autoethnography best supported me in providing a more candid perspective of Hip Hop as both an insider and outsider--one who does not engage in Hip Hop (Chang, 2008) in a way that may generate a more holistic view of schooling experiences of African American students, Hip Hop culture and Hip Hop pedagogy. To be an insider means to be familiar with and fluent in the culture, language, and codes of a particular subculture. However, and outsider is unfamiliar with a culture, language, and codes of a particular subculture and may not understand language or codes they encounter. To an insider, their culture is the norm. To an outsider, the culture being studied does not represent the norm because the culture is not a part of their daily lives. This may support others in

constructing deeper understandings of the intersectionality of society, socialization, Hip Hop, and schooling experiences of children who are minoritized. Next, I will provide examples of how the single story from my perspective as a student, the single story of teaching, and the single story of Hip Hop shaped my conviction to tell my story by providing an autoethnographic account of my teaching experiences with Hip Hop pedagogy.

The single story from my perspective

My perspective as a student

I am often applauded and celebrated for my personal, academic, and professional accomplishments by family and community members who have heard my story. Whether it be my sense of fashion (which can be radical at times), my mime artist/dance performances, my drawings, my community service engagements, my inspirational speeches to children, schools, churches, and others, my leadership roles, my books in which I illustrated and authored, my children's Hip Hop CD, my awards, my role as an Assistant Professor of education, and my doctoral candidacy; many people compliment me for achieving many endeavors by the age of 28. Although many people revere my accomplishments, few are aware of the trials, tragedies, trailblazers (notable people), and transformations that contributed to my triumphs (my story). For instance, judging by facial expressions, many people are often appalled after listening to my recollection of a childhood experience with one of my former White female elementary school teachers (grade level is purposely anonymous). This teacher interrupted my "space shuttle mission" at the top of the sliding board during recess on our school playground with what I named a dreaded proclamation, "You can't be an astronaut because they are rocket

scientists who are great at math. Now get down off of that slide boy!” I was aghast and seeing her ‘roll her eyes’ at me made me feel like I was a problem--‘*the* problem’ (DuBois, 1903)². I was baffled because in my mind I was ‘only’ playing on the slide and I was a ‘young man’ (according to my family and members of the community); not a boy! I never got into any trouble at school. In fact, I was playing alone when she scolded me. I felt like a prisoner, wrongly convicted for a crime I did not commit. After that incident, I rarely enjoyed playing on the playground, fearful of disappointing my teacher or having to mourn the death of her ‘killing’ another one of my dreams.

I internalized and subscribed to the prophetic words of my teacher because from my perspective teachers were the ‘bearers of truth’ who were ‘perfect’ and knew everything about everything. I oftentimes saw no wrong in my teachers during my early school years so I ‘knew’ that my teacher was correct. I never manifested my dreams of becoming an astronaut partially because I subscribed to my teacher’s single story of astronauts and her single story of my potential as one of her students. School textbooks, television shows, movies, classroom books, and other forms of literature that I was exposed to led me to conclude that my teacher was ‘correct’ because I never saw or heard about Black male astronauts at the time. Since my teacher’s single story became my single story, when people applaud and celebrate my personal, academic, and professional accomplishments, I remembered my teacher’s prophecy that I was not ‘good enough’ (personally) or ‘smart enough’ (academically) to become an astronaut (professionally). The danger of that story was the murdering of my dream, the marginalization of my

² DuBois (1903) reflected upon experiences of being viewed as a problem because of race. When using the word ‘problem’ I am referring to negative connotations associated with being Black.

potential, and the truncation of possibilities of who I could become. But, the true danger is that I buried this story in the pit of my very being and vowed to myself never to share the story of defeat with anyone that I was not ‘good enough,’ ‘smart enough,’ or ‘White enough’ to accomplish becoming an astronaut.

I share this story to illustrate how a single story could re-write, narrate and become ‘the’ story of a person’s life. While many may agree that astronauts should be proficient in mathematics and my teacher could have been trying to ‘encourage’ me to do better in mathematics, her story only represents part of the story. Her story was incomplete. It was not that I could not become an astronaut, it was that I could not become an astronaut in her eyes, from her perspective, her worldview. But what was her perception of me based on? I now understand that it was based on deficit conceptions of Black males. Next, I will share how the single story of teaching shaped my identity.

The single story of teaching

I always wanted to be an astronaut when I was a young child. At a parent-teacher organization night, my school allowed us to view the planet Saturn from a very robust telescope. I was intrigued and since then, I wanted to become an astronaut. However, as I grew older I wanted to become an architect because I had an affinity and talent for drawing, sketching, and art; rather than mathematics—though I now know that mathematical skills are also required for architects. By the end of my junior year in high school, I was faced with having to select a college, a major, and career path to advance myself. My high school guidance counselor provided my classmates and I with a wealth of career and college readiness development information such as literature on careers and personal inventories. We used inventories to gauge our interests, talents, and skills in

order to identify possible career trajectories. After taking my inventory, although it became clear through the results that I had no interest in any career choices that required a heavy emphasis on mathematics, I was not appalled. I had firmly convinced myself by then that mathematics was not for me. Perhaps this belief affected the outcome of career inventories.

During my senior year in high school, I was selected by one of my teachers to enroll in the Teacher Cadet course. I assumed that I was selected because my teacher saw me as an ideal teacher candidate. Originally, I had no interest in becoming a teacher because I perceived it to be a ‘female’ career that would not provide me a sufficient salary.

I had not connected my passion, interests, and skills with education until I watched the movie *Drumline* (2002), in which the main character was Devon Miles (played by African American actor Nick Cannon), a recent high school Black male graduate who was a skilled drummer on a marching band at a Historically Black College. As a drum major during my senior year, I could relate to some of the band experiences showcased in the movie. Watching the band/music director’s impact on Mile’s personal and professional development reminded me of my high school band/music director. I admired the passion, straightforwardness, and high expectations that both band/music directors possessed for their students. For the first time, I saw myself as band/music director. The movie allowed me to see how I was already a teacher when I taught band members their dance moves and their music. The movie allowed me to see how I already possessed some of the skills (creativity, inspirational, musically inclined) of a band/music director as I also saw myself in the role of Dr. James Lee, the band/music director in the

movie. The movie expanded and overturned my single story of teaching. I share this story to further demonstrate the danger of a single story, which impacted and shaped my career.

Although there were many educators in my family (my mother, aunts, and cousins), I learned from people, television shows, curriculum materials and literature a single story of teaching. I learned through the lack of images or presence of Black male teachers that teaching was for females. Through conversations with different people and classmates, I learned that it paid a low salary and that I would not have enough patience for ‘bad’ students. News articles and people’s opinion of males who were convicted pedophiles, led me to assume that everyone would view me as a pedophile because it was ‘strange’ for a man to have an interest in working with children. While in some cases these stories may be true, they only represent one perspective of multiple realities. For instance, my learning and perspective expanded when I heard the stories of successful Black male educators who had been ‘cultivated’ by the “Call Me M.I.S.T.E.R.” (Men Instructing Students Towards Effective Role-models) program. While searching online for music education programs, I came across information on the “Call Me M.I.S.T.E.R.” program (Clemson University, 2015). Seeking to learn more about the program, I visited the program’s webpage through Clemson University’s website and links that led me to national and local news articles that shared successful stories of MISTER graduates who were successful teachers. I became energized about the possibility of being a teacher.

Had I internalized the single story of what it meant to become a Black male teacher, without hearing other stories that captured the trials and triumphs of Black male teachers, I would have marginalized my dream (becoming a teacher), my potential

(becoming a doctoral candidate), and my possibilities (becoming an author, illustrator, entertainer, and Assistant Professor of education). While I had assumed that I was now immune from the prophesy of my former elementary teacher that I would not accomplish my dreams because I was not proficient in mathematics, I was confronted with passing the mathematics portion of a teacher qualifications examination (Praxis I)³ as a sophomore, music education major. By now, I was no longer victimized by single stories because the stories of other MISTERS and prominent MISTER graduates like MISTER Damon Qualls (Benedict College graduate), MISTER Mark Joseph (Claflin University graduate), and MISTER Corey Terry (Clemson University graduate) empowered me. Thus, I no longer depended on the ‘minimally adequate education’ provided to me and guaranteed by South Carolina according to the state’s constitution. I knew that I could strive to reach my fullest potential.

As a result, I began to teach myself mathematics content, which supported me in passing the test on the fourth attempt. Knowing the power of single stories, I wanted to become a teacher whose personal life story would empower other students to read beyond single stories that regarded them as failures, incompetents, criminals, ‘bad’, and intellectually inferior. I share this story because I believe that danger of the single story of teaching has produced a legion of potential Black male educators who have fell victim to barriers (e.g., Praxis I examination) and have unconsciously embraced the deficit narratives of failure, incompetence, and criminalization prophesized through single

³ Praxis I is a Pre-Professional Skills Test (PPST) that measures the academic skills of candidates entering teacher preparation programs in reading, writing, and mathematics. All candidates must receive a passing score for their respective state of residence to gain admission into teacher education.

stories. While the single story of teaching impacted my profession and career aspiration as a child, the single story of Hip Hop shaped my personal identity.

The single story of Hip Hop

From my perspective, many local radio stations, and music television stations like Music Television (MTV), and other media outlets packaged Hip Hop as gangsta rap; thereby, marginalizing Hip Hop to a genre of rap that is known for abrasive, profane, and hardcore lyrical content that conveyed life from the perspectives of rappers who considered themselves to be gangstas (Chang, 2005; Rose, 1994). Gangsta rap received popularization from various west coast rappers like N.W.A. (Niggaz Wit Attitudes), a group of six Black male adolescent rappers (Arabian Prince, MC Ren, Ice Cube, Eazy-E, DJ Yella, and Dr. Dre) formed in 1986 from Compton California. N.W.A. sought to convey the socio-economic trials (propagation of drugs, racial profiling, high crime rates, low employment rates) of their daily lives (Chang, 2005). These rappers amongst others felt that their stories were not heard or told from their perspectives. Although these rappers oftentimes glorified misogyny, nudity, and materialism (gold chains, name brand clothing), they are also recognized for their abrasive resistance against the social injustices harbored by the American justice system at the time. This bold resistance was conveyed through N.W.A.'s 1998 hit song, "F*** the police" which was featured on their album, Straight Outta Compton (N.W.A., 1998). As an adolescent, the bold and provocative demeanors of gangsta rap artists like N.W.A. intrigued me. Their lyrics provided me a superficial space to exert my masculinity, my emotions, and my developing identity. Although I was not a 'gangsta' and I did not live the gangsta life, gangsta rap gave me a sense of confidence to embrace my identity unapologetically. I

always knew that I was different from my classmates in the way that I dressed, my talents, and my perspectives, but I desired to fit in. However, gangsta rap afforded me an outlet in which I could embrace my uniqueness.

Spirituality and Hip Hop

Inspired by my church pastor to develop my spirituality, I began to engage in contemporary gospel music, which is a non-traditional genre of gospel music. One day while watching videos on Black Entertainment Television (BET), the music video for the 1997 contemporary gospel song, “Stomp”, by Grammy award winning Christian urban vocal artist Kirk Franklin (1997), featuring female rap duo Salt-N-Pepa member, Cheryl James caught my attention. I began to dance to the Hip Hop beats embedded in the song. To my surprise, near the end of the song, female rapper Cheryl James performed a solo rap. This was the first time that I heard gospel blended with rap music. As a result, I became a huge Kirk Franklin fan and my spirituality was enhanced because Hip Hop served as a bridge to my newfound affinity for contemporary gospel music and Christian rap. I share this story to convey how my life was transformed when I ‘read’ beyond the single story of Hip Hop. I use the word ‘read’ to represent the interpretation of stories presented in the form of music.

The danger of this single story of Hip Hop was that I had lived my life embracing a misrepresented, narrow, and deficit view of Hip Hop that Hip Hop was solely gangsta music. The possibilities of my expressing my ideas, emotions, and perspectives through graffiti art, b-boying, dee-jaying, and emceeing were marginalized because the single story of Hip Hop led me to view them as isolated art forms. To make matters worse, I had not connected the origin of Hip Hop to Africa or the oppressive historical experiences of

people of the African diaspora. While the single story may portray the story, it only shares part of the story. While the single story of Hip Hop defined it as music, other stories defined it as a lifestyle or a way of being. Indeed, Hip Hop represented my passion for art, music, creativity, and culture. This was my story--my identity. Looking back, I realize that the danger was never discovering who I was (my identity) because of the single story of Hip Hop.

The single story of Hip Hop impacts people who have been historically marginalized and oppressed because they (we) become further marginalized because their (our) stories are confined and reduced to narrow conceptions of rap. Moreover, the magnitude and power of Hip Hop is lost because it is packaged and marketed primarily as music (rap); rather than as a subculture consisting of emceeing, b-boy/b-girling, graffiti writing, rapping, knowledge, street fashion, and street language (Chang, 2005; Rose, 1994). From my visual artistic perspective, I believe that graffiti art could enhance the power of my story rather than only depending upon rap as a medium for self-expression. When we marginalize stories, we also marginalize the possibilities of them having a meaningful and robust impact on others.

The need for my story

Recognizing the largely invisible stories of African American teachers, Ladson-Billing's (1995) call for more research conducted by African American teachers appealed to me and encouraged me to share my story as a Black male educator. Indeed, much of the academic literature has not holistically conveyed or reflected the experiences of Black, male, Early Childhood Education teachers who use Hip Hop pedagogy in their classrooms (Muncey, 2010). Without such stories and variations of culturally relevant

teaching, academic literature only represents and showcases ‘single stories’ which reify conceptions of culturally relevant pedagogy as a set of teaching strategies rather than as a continuous process or approach (Boutte & Hill, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 2006) to instruction. For instance, some teachers may become compelled by their misinterpretation of the academic literature on CRP and claim that they are engaged in culturally relevant pedagogy addressing three of the key components of CRP (students achieving academically while developing cultural competence and critical consciousness) suggested by Ladson-Billings (1994, 1995a, 1995b, 2006). While acknowledging that there are other conceptions of CRP beside Ladson-Billings’, the point is that CRP is often represented in formulaic and/or limited ways and there is a need for studies and academic literature, which demonstrate the robust nature of CRP. Otherwise, many minoritized children may experience the ‘danger’ of a single story of CRP when they ‘fail’ in the classrooms of teachers who claim to *do* CRP (Ladson-Billings, 2006). Hence, it is important to detail and illustrate a multitude of experiences of culturally relevant teachers to offer additional stories to counter the ‘single story’ of CRP teachers. Thus, this present study sought to provide such an example to demonstrate the elasticity of CRP as described by Ladson-Billings (1995).

In the following section, I will provide elucidation of how the data sources, method of analysis and research questions converged. Additionally, autoethnography as a research method will be expounded upon. Then I will detail the processes in which collected and analyzed data. Essentially, I analyzed the data (my story) and transposed the data into vignettes to identify my learning outcomes and to make meaning of my classroom experiences.

Research question

As shown on Table 3.1, one research question was posed for the study. Focusing retrospectively on my on teaching, the study was based on an autoethnographic analysis of my teaching using Hip Hop pedagogy in a kindergarten/first-grade classroom.

Table 3.1
Research Question, Data Sources, and Analysis

Research Question	Data Sources	Method of Analysis
1. What can I learn from an examination of my experiences as a Black male teacher from a retroactive examination of my use of Hip Hop Pedagogy in a kindergarten/first grade classroom of African American children?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Notes recorded from video observations of classroom• Archived teaching evaluations, parents' e-mails, student assessments correspondences• Reflective notes• Lesson plans	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Open coding• Coding for themes

Qualitative Research: Autoethnography

Reed–Danahay (1997) defined autoethnography “as a form of self-narrative that places the self within a social context”, and is “the method and the text” (p. 9). Establishing a social context to better understand others and myself provides depth (e.g., multiple dimensions of culture) that quantitative research cannot facilitate independently. Such depth may be useful when stories or perspectives of African American students (qualitative) are used to counter or supplement the dismal statistics concerning the academic underperformance of most African American students as compared to their European American counterparts (Paige & Witty, 2010) and literature on the teachers of

these students (Noguera, 2013; Perry, Steele, & Hilliard, 2003). Unfortunately, these statistics are often used to negatively label and identify African American students in mainstream educational conversations (Perry, Steele, & Hilliard, 2003).

Autoethnography, however, allows for a person like myself who has membership in the culture being explored (Black culture/ Hip Hop) to illustrate social contexts in more holistic ways using cultural knowledge that non-cultural members/researchers may not have access to while simultaneously interpreting them through the lens of a researcher. Therefore, the qualitative autoethnographic method used in this dissertation holds significance because, unlike many other methods, it privileges the story of the researcher/teacher (Chang, 2008, Muncey, 2010) similar to the way in which Hip Hop privileges the story of the rapper or hip hopper (KRS-One, 2009) by embracing innovative alternative perspectives of culture (e.g., graffiti writing, emceeing, rapping) that may otherwise go unseen or unheard in academic literature. Essentially, this method allowed my story and similar stories into the realms of research and scholarship to be explored, examined, critiqued, and analyzed to illustrate aspects of Hip Hop pedagogy for both insiders and outsiders (Chang, 2008). That is, traditionally, researchers have investigated cultures, like Hip Hop from an etic perspective as outsiders (e.g., inadequately using the term synonymously with rap) without insider knowledge (Chang, 2005; Rose, 1994), which have often provided opportunities for cultural information to be manipulated (Freire, 1970) and creating a 'single story' (Adichei (2009, July) about Hip Hop culture. For instance, if early childhood educators are exposed to a single story of Hip Hop culture as presented by (McWhorter, 2003) as violent and vulgar, they may abstain from seeking to understand Hip Hop culture in a more holistic manner. However,

if they are also informed by another story of Hip Hop culture and Hip Hop pedagogy from the perspective of a researcher who is an insider through autoethnography, they may be able to gain deeper insight into the culture and consider it also as an educational tool and perhaps more.

During a presentation on Hip Hop, hip hopper and teacher KRS-One (2009) issued a clarion call for innovative ideas from scholars to supplement what he has calculated as 40 years of research conducted on Hip Hop culture. He contended that such knowledge should come from the perspective of researchers who concurrently identify themselves as embodied Hip Hop (one who is conscious and embraces Hip Hop) and a scholar--those whom he refers to as “true Hip Hop scholars”. This call empowered me to metaphorically pick up my mic (microphone) to rap my story and analyze my experiences through autoethnography (Chang, 2008). Therefore, in this dissertation pronouns like *I* and *my* are used to connote ownership of *my* story, since historically, the stories, ideas, and experiences of African Americans have been stolen, manipulated, and eliminated from dominant discourses (DuBois, 1903; Woodson, 1935).

Context and Participants

In autoethnography, the primary participant in the study is the researcher. Therefore, this dissertation focused on what I learned as a result of approaching much of my instruction using Hip Hop pedagogy in ‘our’ (the children’s and my) kindergarten/first grade classroom. When discussing the classroom, which is the focus of this dissertation, it is necessary to mention that it was not my classroom but that of my co-teachers, students, staff, and family members of students who all had collective ownership of the classroom (Chang, 2008; Foster, 2006; Muncey, 2010). This notion of

collectiveness will guide my research because autoethnography also focuses on the interactions between self and others (Ellis, 2004). Below I describe the school site, my classroom, and myself.

Research Profile: Contexts and Participants

School Site

I taught in a private child development center affiliated with a private Historically Black College in an urban city in the southeastern United States that served the college faculty, staff, and students as well as families from surrounding communities. At the time of the study I was a second year teacher at the school. The study was conducted during the 2010-2011 academic school year. The center is cradled in a national, historic, African American community (Legacyville), which was formally a subdivision of an antebellum plantation. Legacyville holds the distinction of being the first suburb in the metropolitan that surrounds the community. Although Legacyville was originally a predominately white neighborhood, racial segregation contributed to why it is now a predominantly African American neighborhood where several civil rights activists, an African American astronaut and various other notable figures (e.g., mainstream music artists, politicians, and artisans) call home. Currently Legacyville is the home of many low- to middle-income families. There are two historically Black colleges and universities, several Black owned doctor's offices, a black owned dentistry, several predominately Black churches, two predominately Black elementary schools, one middle school, one catholic school, and two childcare centers that serve as resources for the Legacyville and surrounding communities.

At the time of the 2010-2011 study, the child development center serviced approximately 74 students ages six weeks to six-years old from lower-to middle-to upper middle-income families. African American students comprised of 94% of the population while European Americans comprised of 3%; and Nigerians comprised of 1%. The center is also nested in a zone of an urban school district comprised of 73% African Americans, 19% European Americans, 8% who come from other ethnicities and 72% of students who receive free/reduced-price lunch. During the study, the center was re-accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), a nonprofit association in the United States comprised of early childhood educators, center directors, teacher educators, para-educators and other members. NAEYC offers voluntary accreditation for centers or schools who meets and/or exceeds what the association deems as professional standards (relationships (standard 1), curriculum (standard 2), teaching (standard 3), assessment of child progress (standard 4), health (standard 5), teachers (standard 6), Families (standard 7), community relationships (standard 8), physical environment (standard 9), leadership and management, which distinguishes the center or school as 'high quality' (NAEYC, 2015).

The center is comprised of eight classrooms--each of them having a lead teacher and a co-teacher who both typically hold bachelor's degrees in the field of early childhood education or child development in addition to some teachers with advanced degrees and experience. At the time of the study, there were two African American male lead teachers (including me), three African American male co-teachers, six African American female lead teachers, and five African American female co-teachers who taught in classrooms that typically had no more than 10 children; unless they were in

preschool or K-1 classrooms which had 11-15 students. There were three school administrators: one African American male and two African American females.

My Classroom

The door at the entrance of my classroom was often thematically covered with a variety of pictures, images, or students' works. For example, in August, the door was covered with a fire truck in the jungle that incorporated the students' names and works (Figure 3.1). On another occasion the entire classroom door was transformed into a big red barn (Figure 3.2). The classroom was colorful, flagrant, and embodied a jungle theme-based décor (Figure 3.3) to represent the classroom mascot, the Curious Cubs, which I created as the first teacher of the class. I selected the word curious to symbolize the natural curiosity of my students and cubs to represent the tiger mascot of our affiliated college. Safari-like plants and vines draped along the walls around vibrant child work. Inspirational quotes, pictures of classroom children, vivid teacher-made educational posters (e.g., alphabet charts), classroom job charts, and varied pictures of Black Americans (families, school staff, community members, and nationally recognized African Americans), and people with differing abilities from different ethnicities permeated the classroom walls.



Figure 3.1. Classroom jungle theme door featuring a fire truck to represent the topic of fire safety that the students studied. Students' names were placed on stars that encompass the frame of the door.



Figure 3.2 Classroom farm theme door featuring a barn and child-created farmers that are positioned on the sides of the door. There is also an Old McDonald poster.



Figure 3.3 Sample of classroom jungle décor. The reading corner, which is a part of the classroom library is featured with a two bookcases and a tree crafted by me (the teacher). The corner also features a mural of a jungle and a gorilla stuffed animal for children to cuddle with or read to.

In each of the eight learning centers, there was student work, pictures of students, and posters or signs related to the content that was being addressed in the center. All materials were neatly labeled with pictures that had corresponding pictures on classroom furniture to assist students with organization. There was a designated cipher (interactive speaking) area in a quiet corner of the classroom called the “peace tree” where students could go to solve and receive assistance in solving problems they encountered in the center. This area consisted of a small table, two chairs, a wooden gavel, and a potted bamboo plant that sat at the center of the table. Next to the table were images of emotions to support students in conveying their feelings. Enhancing the atmosphere of the classroom was a mixture of Hip Hop, jazz, gospel, pop, Rhythm and Blues, Hispanic, reggae, oriental, and country instrumental music that played as the children engaged in the learning centers and during daily classroom routines (e.g., circle time).

The Curious Cubs

There were 13 children in my kindergarten/first grade classroom as shown in Table 9. Five of the children were first graders (two females and three males) and eight of them were kindergarteners (five males and three females). According to the enrollment application, all of the students identified as African Americans. Based on the income data provided on the application, eight of the students were from middle-socioeconomic status families, two from upper-middle socioeconomic status and three from lower socioeconomic status families. Pseudonyms are used for all of the students in this dissertation. The familial demographics for the children's parents can be seen on Table 3.3.

Table 3.2
Study Participants

Race/Ethnicity	Gender	Grade level
Black/African American	5 Males	Kindergarten
	2 Females	Kindergarten
	2 Males	First Grade
	3 Females	First Grade

Table 3.3
Parents/Guardians of Participants

Grade Level	Students	Household information
Kindergarten	2 students	Single-parent
	2 students	Married
	1 student	Reared by grandparents
First Grade	3 students	Single-parent
	3 students	Married
	1 student	Reared by grandparents

MISTER. B.⁴

I was born in Charleston, South Carolina, the low country/coastal area of the state. As my mother recalls, I was one-year old, at the gravesite following the funeral service of my great-grandfather in a rural area in Cross, South Carolina, singing as loudly as I could. She claimed it was then when she realized that I would be a talented child. After visiting Cross, South Carolina for the funeral, my mother and I moved to Orangeburg County, New York--the upstate area of New York--where I spent my formative years from birth to age four. I was originally raised in a Seventh Day Adventist church in Nanuet, New York, where gospel music and visual arts (e.g., puppets, movement) were the primary form of ministry for children. We would sing numerous children-inspired praise and worship songs during children's church and during vacation bible school, where I spent every summer. My mother frequently recounts a moment when I was a two-year old singing in the front of the church and some people chanted "Go Tony! Go Tony!" and I began to break dance before the congregation. It was this part of my life where I developed a love for musical performance, as a young soloist, choir member, and avid dancer (Figure 3.4).

⁴ When using MISTER B, I am referencing myself, Anthony Broughton. The capitalization symbolizes my affiliation with the Call Me M.I.S.T.E.R. program.



Figure 3.4. Little “Tony” singing at Berea Seventh Day Adventist Church in Nanuet, New York

Connecting with Hip Hop at home. My mother and I and several other family members visited my grand uncle’s house regularly in Nyack, New York. My infatuation with Hip Hop culture was ignited when I visited the room of older cousins who were then teenagers living in the lower level of my grand uncle’s house. As I entered the large basement-turned-bedroom, lit by a green light bulb, the posters of Hip Hop rappers like Big Daddy Kane, graffiti art, captivated me as the bass of my cousin’s Hip Hop music pulsated the walls of the room. It was as if I had entered another world—one that I finally felt like I belonged. However, this experience did not fully resonate with me until I later moved to rural South Carolina, three years later (at the age of five) with my mother to reside with my grandmother, two uncles, an aunt, and my younger cousin, K.J..

My uncles were both in their early 20s and had also spent some time ‘up north’ (New York) with my cousins. They both would blast Hip Hop songs from their rooms and from the car as they drove throughout the community. I would hold my ears as I road with them because the music would be so loud. One day my Uncle Marcus, the younger uncle taught me my first rap. “My name is Tony. I learn how to rap, and if you don't like it, hommie don't play dat!” To me, that was my official initiation into the Hip Hop culture because ever since I learned that rap, Hip Hop had a new meaning. My new response to the music being blasted from the rooms and cars of my uncles led me to realize that I felt a part of Hip Hop culture after learning my first rap. I no longer held my ears as I rode in the car, but I began to embrace the robust energy of the songs.

I became fluent in Hip Hop culture over the years under the tutelage of my uncles as I watched television networks like Black Entertainment Television (BET) and Music Television (MTV) and collected pop culture and Hip Hop magazines. Admittedly, I was exposed to a lot of negative aspects of Hip Hop (e.g., violence, gangster images, degradation of women) in music videos and songs but I tried to mentally filter out those aspects while listening to enjoy the artistry of Hip Hop music. This was because I embraced Christianity as a religion and I did not want to “go to hell” for watching or engaging in “the devil’s music” as my grand uncle would call it because it conflicted First Timothy (Chapter 2; verse 9) ⁵ and several other scriptures that discusses modesty and respect. Instead of neglecting Hip Hop music, I negotiated with myself and decided to abstain from reciting negative lyrics.

⁵ First Timothy (Chapter 2; verse 9): And I want women to be modest in their appearance. They should wear decent and appropriate clothing and not draw attention to themselves by the way they fix their hair or by wearing gold or pearls or expensive clothes.

Molded by music. I attended predominately African American schools throughout my educational journey in rural areas in South Carolina. Hip Hop music and culture were prevalent among the youth in those rural areas, which are areas in which are rarely addressed in Hip Hop research. Most of the research on Hip Hop focuses on the impact of Hip Hop from an urban perspective. However, where I am from in rural South Carolina, graffiti could be found on the walls of buildings on a “dirt road” (unpaved road) and Hip Hop music was played at “block parties” (parties held in a person’s yard in the community). Fortunately, three of my music teachers throughout my schooling valued, appreciated the Black cultural music and dance. Though it may have been against district policy, I recall several of my music teachers allowing us to sing and play gospel music in music class, which nurtured my spiritual needs in school. During middle school, I was recruited by our Black American male high school music director to join the marching band and school chorus. He later appointed me to the head drum major position of the band--the highest leadership rank for marching band members. I enjoyed experiencing aspects of black culture (e.g., drums, R&B, gospel, Hip Hop) through the marching band. I also became intrigued by the college life at Historically Black Colleges since our marching band participated in several college homecoming parades. Eventually, I decided to attend a Historically Black College in the southeastern region of the United States to pursue a degree in music education to extend and enhance my knowledge of how music could bolster the educational experience of students. I later changed my major to art education, then to elementary education because of testimonials of music educators in the field who claimed that music education was poorly funded and that I would experience difficulty securing a job as a music instructor. I took an educational course, “Integrating

the Arts”, that supported me in developing the knowledge base and skills to connect and synthesize art (visual and performing arts) with education (academic “standards”, content, etc.) using my talents and cultural experiences with Hip Hop and other genres.

My positionality. As a former fourth grade teacher⁶, I have personally witnessed how Hip Hop pedagogy can be implemented to garner students’ personal and academic success. Witnessing my Black male high school music teacher use popular Hip Hop songs that we as students brought to class to teach my classmates by teaching us how to transpose the songs into sheet music led me to assume in high school that Hip Hop could be used as an instructional tool in other subject areas like language arts and mathematics. As a teacher education student at a historically black college I was able to test this assumption through experiences with the *Call Me M.I.S.T.E.R.* (Mentors Instructing Students Toward Effective Role Models) program, an initiative geared towards increasing the pool of males teachers from ‘diverse’ backgrounds aimed at preparing them teach in low performing elementary schools (Clemson University, 2015). As a participant in this program, I attended a plethora of personal and professional development workshops facilitated by graduates from the M.I.S.T.E.R. program (those who became certified teachers) and M.I.S.T.E.R. faculty who operated the program. In these professional development workshops, I witnessed graduates such as M.I.S.T.E.R. Zebulun Dinkins model Hip Hop pedagogy to address mathematics, science, social studies, and language arts using South Carolina standards-based concepts with both Black and White students (Gibson, 2007) which extended the knowledge (ideas) gleaned from

⁶ I taught fourth grade for one year in a public elementary school during my first year teaching. The school was/is seated in an area in which the state referred to as a poverty stricken area.

my high school instructor regarding using relevant music as a part of the instructional process. Having learned how Hip Hop pedagogy could be enacted, through practicing (the process of trying teaching methods, reflecting, and modifying them to retry), I implemented Hip Hop pedagogy with kindergarten/first grade students in summer enrichment camps, during student teaching, and at community and family events. I later implemented Hip Hop pedagogy as a certified public school teacher with fourth grade students in a 99% Black student population in a poverty-stricken area. I personally witnessed ways in which Hip Hop pedagogy supported academic achievement of my Black students. I based this on my observations of their prolonged engagement (actively participating by collaboratively reciting rap songs, dancing, nodding heads, etc.) during my implementation of Hip Hop pedagogy and the satisfactory academic performance (test, quizzes, etc.) of my students. I was influenced by my early coursework as a doctoral student by literature I found regarding culturally relevant pedagogy and Hip Hop pedagogy (Emdin, 2010; 2011; Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Collectively, my experiences as a student, teacher, and scholar implementing Hip Hop pedagogy suggested that Hip Hop pedagogy was effective when implemented with intentionality. This proximity to Hip Hop offers me an ‘insider’ perspective that lends itself to producing “thick” descriptions (Geertz, 1973, p.10) of the culture in my research. I did not have to intrude into the culture to collect the data because I was the data source and I also claim membership in Hip Hop culture. I brought my set of lens, my perspectives, and biases to my research, especially when I began interpreting my data (Chang, 2008, Patton, 2002). I consciously addressed my potential blindspots and biases by remaining committed to transparency and ongoing reflection using a reflective journal

. Such transparency manifested through journal writings, as I inscribed my emotions, feelings, and ideas throughout my study. I self-critiqued (interrogated) and questioned my emotions, feelings, ideas, and perceptions to seek ways in which my positionality influenced my interpretation of data (Chang, 2008). I enacted transparency by sharing these feelings and thoughts in my research. I used literature (Patton, 2002) to support me in unpacking some of the feelings that may emerge during the study to help me make sense of data; even those that may seem troubling or difficult to grapple with. In essence, I have sought to balance my role as an “insider” (Hip Hop culture member) and an “outsider” (Researcher) to acknowledge and address potential biases and blind spots in this dissertation.

Data Collection Methods

Data sources for this study consisted of artifacts (electronic classroom portfolio, videos of classroom instruction, classroom, archived teaching evaluations, parents e-mails, student assessments correspondence, lesson plans and reflective notes) amassed over the course of one full year (including summer school). These data sources informed my interpretations and analyses of my classroom instruction and personal and professional development to identify my learning outcomes as the kindergarten-first grade teacher. I triangulated data (Patton, 2002) to enhance the fidelity and trustworthiness of my study using two kinds of data: (1) personal memories/self-observational/self-reflective data and (2) external data⁷ (archived teaching evaluations, parents’ emails).

⁷ An electronic classroom portfolio, which is a collection of digital classroom photos and videos amassed over the span of one year of me fostering Hip Hop pedagogy in our classroom (Chang, 2008).

Personal memory data. These data consisted of chronicled events during one full year as a kindergarten/first grade teacher. Digital classroom photos, videos, and documents regarding my classroom (electronic classroom portfolio) were used to support me in the recollection process (Chang, 2008). This process entailed reflectively journaling my thoughts and memories while reviewing the data collected. To support me in accuracy and triangulation (Patton, 2002) as well as to understand other perspectives, archived transcripts from semi-structured interviews (Foster, 2006) with co-teachers of the classroom were cross-referenced with other data to support the accuracy of the data. These data were previously collected due to the perceived limited availability of participants.

Since minutes after an event our interpretations change from what they might have been in the moment, admittedly, there were times when I forgot what memories meant in the moments captured in the data (Chang, 2008). I countered this dilemma by re-examining images or videos and clarifying those memories. For organization purposes, labels that described each picture in my electronic classroom portfolio were utilized. During instances in which I was unable to recall memories, I coded as much of the data as possible, documented the experience in my journal, revisited it at a later time or deleted it. Furthermore, throughout the year, I reflected and documented situations that emerged in the data that I felt meant something different to me at the time of the study than it would have during my teaching experience. I maintained such transparency by providing “thick description” (Geertz, 1973, p.10) of the shifts in my thinking, decision-making and perspectives that are essential to understanding my development as a teacher

and scholar of Hip Hop pedagogy. Table 3.4 demonstrates how all of these aspects played a poignant role in helping me to tell *my* story.

Table 3.4
Personal Memory Data

Research Question	
What can I learn from an examination of the experiences of Black male kindergarten/first grade teacher and students from a retroactive examination of the use of Hip Hop Pedagogy in a kindergarten/first grade classroom of African American children?	
Personal memory data	Rationale
Digital classroom portfolio (Chang, 2008)	To examine what I could learn from the context of my classroom, instructional approaches and environment to trigger and enhance memories and remind me of things that I may have forgotten.
Co-teachers interview transcript (Foster, 2006)	To cross-reference information about my classroom, instructional approaches, and environment with information provided by co-teachers. To also trigger and enhance memories and remind me of things that I may have forgotten.
Reflective journal entries (Patton, 2002)	To reflect upon what I learned from my experiences as a culturally relevant (Hip Hop pedagogy) kindergarten-first grade teacher and to evaluate lesson plans.

External data (Artifacts). These are data that included e-mails and correspondence from parent/family members about their child's classroom experience, and administrative evaluations of my teaching amassed over the course of one full school

year (including summer school). These data were retrieved from school emails, archived text correspondences from parents/family members. These data were archived as a part of my classroom portfolio to document my teaching and the development of my kindergartners and first graders. It was customary for teachers at our center to compile this type of data weekly to build our classroom portfolios to submit at the end of each school year to school administration. This data further supported the fidelity and trustworthiness of my study and addressed the subjective nature of aspects of my study because it provided images of my students and I engaged in instructional activities and opportunities for me to reflect upon those images to cross-reference with other data (Chang, 2008). The external data and the rationale for its retrieval are identified and described in Table 3.5.

Table 3.5
External Data

Research Question		
What can I learn from an examination of the experiences of Black male kindergarten/first grade teacher and students from a retroactive examination of the use of Hip Hop Pedagogy in a kindergarten/first grade classroom of African American children?		
External data	Rationale	Description
E-mails and correspondence from parent/family members	To cross-reference my examination of what I learned from the context of my classroom, instructional approaches and environment by exploring parents' and family members' perspectives of my instructional approach.	E-mails and correspondence collected over the course of one year that provided perspectives of parents and families about my instructional approach and impact on their children were examined.

Administrative evaluations of my teaching	To cross-reference information about what I learned from my classroom, instructional approaches, and environment based on the feedback of school administration.	Teaching evaluation reports received electronically from school administration throughout the school year were explored.
Student assessment	To explore what I learned from my experiences (impact of instructional approaches on children) as a culturally relevant (Hip Hop pedagogy) kindergarten-first grade teacher.	Student assessment consisted of report cards of all kindergarteners and first graders for the entire year and videos of one kindergarten and one first grader being assessed two-to-three weeks after learning the concept through Hip Hop pedagogy.

Organization of data. The data were organized and recorded on a secured, password-protected computer. The data were categorized by labeling and storing it electronically using an electronic filing system to support an audit trail of my work (Chang, 2008). Labels used for organization of data identified how I acquired the data (artifacts), by whom or what, when it was acquired, and the identified emergent or reoccurring theme or code associated with the specific data.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed by searching for connections between my data, information regarding sociocultural contexts unveiled in my data (e.g., classroom experiences), and academic literature (Chang, 2008). The data sources were ‘unpacked’ (analyzed and deconstructed) by reflecting, interrogating and detailing my interpretations

of the data. I used: (1) memos; (2) checklists; (3) coding; and (4) themes to analyze, interpret and make sense of the data to then share my story (the findings of this study) through vignettes.

Vignettes. The findings of this dissertation are presented as snapshots to engage the reader and make the findings manageable for the reader to make meaning of the data (Humphreys, 2005). Using this approach I shared my lived experiences with the readers and attempted to provoke reflection in ways that would encourage them to re-examine and evaluate experiences in their own lives. Vignettes afforded me an avenue to convey and share my emotions and personal information with readers who can also concurrently construct their own meanings. Additionally, vignettes allowed me to illustrate the multidimensionality and complexity of events that traditional narration may not be able to illustrate (Humphreys, 2005). Moreover, vignettes were used as a method to compare and contrast my personal experiences against existing research to address the gap in existing literature (Ronai, 1996).

Memos. As data were investigated, I composed memos to document my impressions, emotions, and ideas concerning emerging themes, reoccurring themes, topics, and patterns (Chang, 2008). These aspects are essential in telling my story because they contextualize my experiences by sharing my emotions and decision-making; and the sharing of emotions and decision-making are often neglected in most research (Kincheloe, 2008). Since I approached my instruction using culturally relevant pedagogy, I used culturally relevant pedagogy as a theoretical construct (Ladson-Billings, 1995b) to analyze my data. I sought to identify occurrences, patterns or events (Chang, 2008) that would shed insight into what I learned from my experience as a kindergarten/first grade

teacher. For instance, when analyzing my instruction, Ladson-Billings' (1995b) theoretical construct regarding teachers conceptions of self and others, supported me in examining how my beliefs (conceptions of self and others) impacted my instructional approach. I composed journal entries (memos) regarding my emotions and ideas concerning those type of occurrences to support me in also delving into my cultural background (Creswell, 1989) to assess my relationship with others and to interpret meanings of events in the data.

Checklists. I constructed a South Carolina state standards for Early Learning checklist (Appendix K) to analyze my videos, pictures from my classroom portfolio (Harper, 2002), and my electronic portfolio. Since South Carolina standards are all categorized according to the developmental domains (language, cognitive, social-emotional, physical, and writing development), I used this checklist as an initial phase in analyzing data to document student outcomes. For instance, the social-emotional standards supported me in looking for certain behaviors and interactions of my children as they engaged in Hip Hop pedagogy. I remained open to what I saw that might not have aligned with the standards. Additionally, I used a list of Ladson-Billings' (1995a) tenets (academic excellence, cultural competence, and critical consciousness) and features (conception of self and others, conception of knowledge, and social relations) (Ladson-Billings, 1995b) of culturally relevant pedagogy to analyze and understand my teaching approaches. This was important since I wanted to reflect on the efficacy of my use of culturally relevant pedagogy.

Coding. All data were coded using a six-step process as illustrated by (Lichtman, 2013):

- Step 1. Initial coding (Open coding)

When I employed open coding as a strategy I explored each word, line, sentence, paragraph, images, and videos several instances to seek answers to questions like, “What does this mean?” In addition to addressing that question, when analyzing videos, I wrote down quotes and observational notes about the context. I then labeled words or sentences with codes to then categorize further in the data analysis process. During the initial coding (Table 3.6) 28 codes were identified from the collection of data.

Table 3.6
Initial coding (open coding)

Step 1. Initial coding (open coding)
Student participation
Insider knowledge
Lack of confidence
Contrary to teachings of teachers
Trap (Hip Hop language)
Female dominated gestures
Perplexed
Unprepared
Social-Emotional development
Micro aggression

Inappropriateness
Responsibility as a teacher
Self-reflection
Personal experiences in school
Emotional
Student identity
Authentic observation
Engaging
Intentionality
Focus on understanding
Challenge students
Writing
Communal discussions
Citizenship
Student interpretations
Family support
Extended learning
Parent relationships

- Step 2. Revisited initial coding.

At this stage I had a 29 codes that I needed to revisit, analyze, delete or refine. I encountered some codes that were redundant or related so I merged, color-coded and renamed the codes. When revisiting initial coding, I interrogated my codes by asking myself questions like, “Is this what this really mean?” to ensure clarity and conciseness

of my codes. When I decided that a code should be modified I noted in my research journal my purpose and my rationale for the change or deletion. I used a color key (see Table 3.7) to classify codes that I believed were similar to make my coding more succinct.

Table 3.7
Color key for revised coding

Student identity construction	Aspects that describe the students (e.g., individual interests, behavior and talents)
Hip Hop insider knowledge	Knowledge acquired as a member of the culture
Teacher identity (Experiences)	Experiences that shaped the teacher's identity
Instructional approaches	Ways in which the teacher approached instruction.

Table 3.8
Sample of revisited initial coding

Sample of Revisited initial coding
Student ownership
Insider knowledge of Hip Hop
Hip Hop participant
Frantic
Lack of confidence
Contrary to teachings of teachers
Trap (Hip Hop language)
Female dominated gestures

Perplexed
Feelings of unpreparedness
Social-Emotional development
Micro aggression
Perception
Responsibility as a teacher
Self-critique
Personal experiences in school
Emotional
Student identity
Critical observation
Child engagement
Intentionality
Focus on understanding
Challenge students
Expressive art
Cyphers
Citizenship
Student interpretations
Family support
Extended learning
Parent relationships

- Step 3. Developed an initial list of categories.

At the conclusion of revisiting initial codes, I had a list of 30 codes. I reviewed the list of codes to begin organizing them into categories. I reviewed each code looking for major topics that emerged amid them. I identified some of the codes as major topics, which allowed me to classify some of the remaining codes under those major topics as subsets. At the conclusion of this step, I transformed my list of codes into a list of categories. To address my research question I classified codes that led me to answering my research questions regarding my learning experiences implementing Hip Hop pedagogy with my students. As a result, I took the 29 codes and classified them under student identity construction, Hip Hop insider knowledge, teacher identity, and instructional approaches.

- Step 4. Modified initial list of categories based on additional reading.

Having reviewed the initial lists of categories on several occasions, I then evaluated each category for relevance or essentialness. I asked myself questions like, “Is this category essential or relevant to my research question?” After identifying categories that were related I double-checked to determine if I needed to create more succinct categories. However, I did not have to revise my categories during this step.

- Step 5. Revisited categories and subcategories.

At this stage I revisited my categories to ensure that they were appropriately arranged and logically organized.

- Step 6. Moved from categories to concept.

After enacting the six-step process of coding (Lichtman, 2013), I explored narrative coding (Saldana, 2009) to support me in detailing the concepts that will be constructed in step six (concept development). This form of coding was necessary in transforming my data into an accessible (easy to understand) format for readers. Since I examined data as a whole instead of in isolated parts to begin making sense of the data, I combined all of the pieces of data to begin forming one overarching idea (Chang, 2008). The overarching idea is that critical self-reflection and self-critique was essential in identifying and making meaning of my experiences implementing Hip Hop pedagogy in my k-1 classroom. The categories led me to also reflect upon student's identity construction, Hip Hop insider knowledge, teacher identity, and my instructional approaches. The concept I developed was that my Hip Hop insider knowledge was a part of my teacher identity, which informed my instructional approach that supported the identity construction of my students. This concept pointed directly at me thus, inspiring me to analyze the experiences that lead to the ascertainment of Hip Hop insider knowledge.

Themes. I sought to find emerging themes, reoccurring topics, and patterns as I investigated the data. Such investigation required me to connect the present with the past in order to gain a deeper understanding of how my identity may have impacted or influenced (Chang, 2008) Hip Hop pedagogy in my classroom. An effort was made to contextualize my work broadly by also connecting behaviors and events to sociocultural, political, geographical economical, religious contexts (Chang, 2008). As a result I identified four emerging themes: 1.) Student voice; 2.) Conceptions of Hip Hop/Hip Hop pedagogy; 3.) Culturally relevant pedagogy dimensions; 4.) Culturally relevant teaching.

Table 3.9
Emerging themes

Emerging Themes	Descriptions
Student voice	Student perspectives, performances, worldviews and ideas
Conceptions of Hip Hop/Hip Hop pedagogy	Ways in which Hip Hop/Hip Hop pedagogy was understood, perceived, and embraced.
Culturally relevant pedagogy dimensions	Teacher's conception of self and others, conception of knowledge, and social relations
Culturally relevant teaching	Instructional approaches that support student academic excellence, cultural competence, and critical consciousness
Non-Emerging Themes	Descriptions
Gender	Impact of gender on learning experiences
Socialization	Learned through lived experiences
Unintentional learning	Instructional approaches that were not intentionally planned or implemented.

Fidelity and Trustworthiness

Verisimilitude. Due to the subjective nature of my work, validity and reliability as traditionally conceptualized did not serve as sufficient measures for this work (Sparks, 2002). However, in autoethnographic research the auto-ethnographer seeks verisimilitude, which is how the work evokes a sense that the experience represented in the work is realistic, truthful, insightful, or believable (Ellis, 2004; Plummer, 2001;

Sparks, 2002). This was addressed by using a “thick description” (Geertz, 1973, p.10) of my cultural experiences and interpretations in my auto ethnographic account (Goodall, 2001). That is, I made my texts coherent, aesthetic and evocative in the way that I use descriptive and sensory-based words to create a visual representation (Adams, 2006) to help usher the “readers into the scene” (Ellis, 1993, p.711), which consist of my thoughts, emotions, and actions. For instance, when describing my classroom experiences I discussed the room arrangement, classroom décor, and my students and also my immediate reactions like feelings of reluctance when making ethical decisions in response to the actions of my students. I drew from my own experiences with Hip Hop culture (e.g. graffiti writing) to provide context and clarity for the reader to help them understand graffiti writing. These descriptions stemmed from my cultural experience--my feelings, stories, and life events as evidenced by my cultural artifacts (Chang, 2008) like graffiti writing samples (See Figure 5) in which I attempted to share with the readers in an intimate manner. The reader will evaluate whether or not my work was emotionally or intellectually moving (Richardson, 2000). In addition I sought to refer back to existing literature to identify ways that my research could answer questions or share perspectives that were not addressed in the literature (Goodall, 2001). Finally, I provided transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) of my work to the readers by sharing my teaching strategies in detail so that the readers could reflect upon ways in which they could use my research to tailor their teaching approaches.

Reflexivity. I engaged in reflexivity (reflection) by using research literature (Ladson-Billings, 1995a, 1995b) and my theoretical framework to analyze my experiences (Richardson, 2000) unveiled partly through my data collection while taking

into consideration ways to make my experience relevant and personal to the readers. This was addressed by first admitting that my experiences include ‘others’ who have contributed to my life and others who co-existed indirectly. Therefore, eliciting data (artifacts) from those others will support me in co-constructing my narrative (Bochner & Ellis, 1995) in a way that may enhance the likelihood of me connecting with the reader.

Using reflexivity, I reflected upon and self-evaluated my teaching approaches and instructional impact of students and conveyed my reflections through vignette reflections. In vignette reflections, I reflected upon whether or not my teaching approach (what I identified as culturally relevant pedagogy), which is detailed in a vignette, aligned with the criteria for culturally relevant pedagogy established by Ladson-Billings (1995a, 1995b). I began by using my culturally relevant pedagogy checklist to determine if I met the criteria (Ladson-Billings, 1995a, 1995b) by fostering academic excellence, cultural competence, and critical consciousness development). Then I provided examples of ways I either met or were unsuccessful with meeting the criteria and reflected upon ways I could have met the criteria. I also used the checklist to reflect upon ways I could enhance my instruction. I remained transparent about moments when my teaching did not fit within the construct of culturally relevant pedagogy by reflecting upon why it did not fit, why I believed that it fit, and what I learned from those experiences.

There were instances in my classroom when I felt reluctant or unsuccessful using Hip Hop pedagogy. I remained transparent by sharing and reflecting upon these experiences through vignettes and vignette reflections. I asked myself questions like, “Why did I feel reluctant?” to also reflect personally on how my conceptions of myself and others; conceptions of knowledge; and social relations (Ladson-Billings, 1995b)

impacted my teaching approaches. Essentially, rather than focusing solely on my failures or strengths using Hip Hop pedagogy, I sought to make meaning of those experiences by identifying teachable moments (what I learned from my experiences) to answer my research question.

CHAPTER 4

TEACHABLE MOMENTS IN MY CLASSROOM

In this Chapter I will present teachable moments in my classroom. The teachable moments were a result of me reflecting upon classroom experiences revealed in data sources like videos of my classroom instruction. To illustrate contexts in which these moments occurred, I present my data in the form of vignettes. The vignettes were developed via the coding scheme, in which I began with open-coding (documenting words and immediate thoughts; Lichtman, 2013) and then moved towards revisiting and revising those codes to generate themes. These vignettes represent key themes that were apparent across several data sources (e.g., videos of students, personal memory, photos, journal entries). Since this dissertation also represents my story and Hip Hop can be used to also tell stories; I present my experiences as *tracks* or songs to what I view through Hip Hop as ‘soundtrack’ of my k-1 classroom experience. Thus, this chapter is also an album (an artistic representation of myself) comprising of *tracks* (different experiences) that tell stories of my classroom learning experiences.

Vignette One: Track One- “Patterns” by MISTER B

The students have all eaten lunch and are gathered around in a circle on the carpet

as a part of their daily class family procedure. They sit and talk quietly as MISTER B⁸ (myself) sanitizes the table used for lunch. Chance, a male kindergartener, sits bobbing his head looking at a chart that I constructed with different shape patterns. Noticing Chance bobbing his head, Abby, a female first grader, begins to bob her head--both seeming to internally recite lyrics in their heads. As I approached the carpet, Abby shouted out “Hey MISTER B can you do that patterns song for us?” Without a direct response, I, who had been quietly sanitizing the table and cleaning, leaped into a performance; rapping and dancing around the room!

Patterns, patterns, are everywhere.

It can be shapes or colors or something you wear.

You can find it in music making a song.

It can be in Mother Nature as you walk around.

Watch out look out for the patterns you can find them in space even on the planet Saturn.

It can be the words you say or the words you read.

You can spot them all around your community.

You can make them yourself or point them out.

You can find them in some hairstyles without a doubt.

It can be a group of numbers that you can count.

We’re gonna’ start with shapes to make you dance and bounce. The children responded, “Circle, circle, circle, square” and “Triangle, square, triangle, square” and

⁸ MISTER B represents my proud affiliation with the “Call Me M.I.S.T.E.R.” program. Each of the capital letters represents the acronym of the program (Men Instructing Students Towards Effective Role-modeling).

performed dance moves that I made for each shape. The song emerged from my previous class discussion on patterns. Although patterns do not necessarily have to consist of shapes, I used shapes as my initial example.

When I first started teaching about patterns, I wanted to gauge my student's prior knowledge about patterns so I asked them questions like, "Where can you find patterns?" and "Give me examples of patterns." As a result of responses like, "Saturn has pattern rings around it" and "I have patterns in my hair," I went home and constructed a rap out of the various examples provided by the K-1 students. I sacrificed several hours at home to ensure the rap flowed (Edwards, 2009) and sounded smooth. I wrote, I rapped; then the next day, I performed on *my* stage (classroom) for my fans (students). Judging by the children's engagement, my song seemed to be a hit. I continued to create raps about self-esteem, months of the year, weather, counting and other content that I felt may be useful for my students.

Reflection on Vignette One: Track One- "Patterns" by MISTER B

It was *my* show; and *my* time to shine when I performed the "Patterns" song. Rather than only focusing on the learning connections fostered with my students, I channeled my inner gifts, my talents, my soul, and myself to *my* 'lesson.' I felt like I could not be myself in most of my classrooms as a former student. I did not have the power to do connect myself to the content or culture of many of the classrooms I was sentenced to learn in. However, in *my* classroom, I used my power to channel my rapping skills into the lesson plan. I did not simply craft rhyming words. Rather, I intentionally crafted content provided by the students and I to reinforce information about patterns. Had the students been older, I could have supported my students in crafting their own raps about

patterns but the children were in kindergarten and first grade. Based on my knowledge of them, they learned and performed well when provided a model, demonstration, and repeated practice. Through my performance, I envisioned myself as that model and demonstration. I noticed that when I performed for my students, I was passionate and their smiles, laughter, and requests led me to believe they enjoyed it. During my performances, I felt like I was in *my* own world. I was the superstar performing for my fans (students). While my beliefs were faulty and problematic in many ways, the approach seemed to be quite effective (Jenkins, 2013). Later I read about Emdin (2010) notion of co-generative dialogues (reciprocal conversation amid two or more people) and cyphers (reciprocal dialogues using free-style rap amid two or more people). The idea of both is that they should be reciprocal between the teacher and students. My uni-directional approach (from the teacher to the students) was far from reciprocal.

Armed with new understandings, I reflected on my initial approach with Hip Hop in my early childhood classroom. I had fostered academic excellence (Ladson-Billings, 1995a) by not only contributing content, but also questioning their prior knowledge about patterns (which I equated with developing critical consciousness). Through discussions about configurations in hair, clothing (e.g., dashikis), and buildings in our local community as well as ancient ones (e.g., Egyptian pyramid), I believed that I was fostering cultural competence. I believed that through the lesson students gained a sense of pride knowing that they were a part of a heritage of people who were the architects, engineers, and owners of such structures and artifacts. At the time, I was satisfied with the academic and personal performance of my children because my students seemed as if

they understood the concepts. They were able to identify and create patterns independently.

Looking back, I recognize that my early attempts at culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 2009) were undeveloped and misguided in some ways. In my mind, even my mode of dress represented an embodiment of my being a culturally relevant pedagogue. Each day, I wore neatly pressed (ironed) slacks, a crisply starched, collared shirt, and a bow-tie (see Figure 4.1). Like one of the teachers (Pauline Dupree) described in Ladson-Billings' (1994) classic book, *The Dreamkeepers: Successful Teachers of African American Students*, I take teaching seriously and my attire is representative of that.



Figure 4.1. MISTER B wearing a bow-tie in the school library.

Through self-reflection, I realized that I was a part of the 'problem' (Ladson-Billings, 2006). I based some of my teaching approaches on how I *felt* physically at the moment rather than on my purpose and mission for teaching. I realized that my mission was bigger than how I felt and entailed something larger than me. My mission was to

support social change and inspire children through CRP, while I also continued to bud as a scholar. After redirecting my focus on myself to the future of my students, it became clear that I had to not only perform for my students but I had to foster an environment of producers and consumers (Jenkins, 2013) of knowledge through culturally relevant pedagogy. I realized that I was not fully tapping into the talents and ideas of my students because I was the producer and they were the consumers. I produced Hip Hop music and the students only wore the headphones and danced. This realization do not occur overnight so much of my first few months of teaching using Hip Hop pedagogy to some degree, focused mostly on my production.

Admittedly, I was mortified to share the stage (classroom power) with my students. While children were actively involved, I think that I fit Ladson-Billings' (1994) description as a "conductor". Conductors are described as teachers who take responsibility for that students' success and also expect excellence. Stylistically, this can work in a classroom. For me, nothing happened in the classroom without my orchestration. Behind the desire to have total 'control' in my classroom was an embarrassing feeling that I was unprepared with an instructional approach to respond to whatever my students would say when I metaphorically 'passed the mic' (allowed them to share their ideas openly). My unpreparedness came to an end, when the lyrics of Hip Hop female rapper and entrepreneur Nicki Minaj's "Beez in the trap" made its debut in my kindergarten-first grade classroom.

Vignette Two: Track Two-Beez in the trap

Context

An important part of a typical day in my kindergarten-first grade consisted of

children engaged in interactive learning activities within eight compartmentalized learning centers. During these times, the children normally worked with materials in respective centers for approximately one hour. While the learning centers included areas that are usually seen in kindergarten (e.g., a library, blocks, art, science, writing, manipulatives, dramatic play, and a sand and water center), I named the dramatic play center the “imagination center,” because I wanted the students to be reminded of the freedom and shared authority they possessed to transform the center into whatever they liked. Rather than the learning center being a conventional housekeeping/dramatic play area, which is typically a compartmentalized area with child-sized house furniture, plastic toy food, child-sized clothing, and plastic cooking utensils, the “imagination center” was a place in which children had the autonomy to tailor the center to their interests such as a zoo or space shuttle. On a daily basis, the classroom buzzed with small- and large-group activities, which provided many opportunities for children to learn and for me to learn about the children. Below is a vignette, which I call, *Beez in the trap*, which entails children engaging in Hip Hop literacies.

Beez in the trap

On this particular morning around 9:30 a.m., while observing two Black male kindergarteners students beat on shower caddies that they converted into "bongos" by turning the caddies upside down as they played in the Imagination center, I heard one of my female students, India, rapping her rendition of what I found to be a familiar and mainstream rap song by female rapper Nicki Minaj (2012), “Beez in the trap”:

“Pimpin ain’ slick and they ain’ sayin nuh-in [nothing]. I hunna [hundred] ah suckahs can’t tell me nuh-in. Beez in the trap, bee bee in the trap. Beez in the

trap, bee beez in the trap.”

Fully understanding the content of the song, I was almost thankful that she had learned the “clean” (radio) version instead of the original version, which used profanity. Had she rapped the original version in class, I would have heard “Bi***es (profane word) instead of the word “pimpin’” and “Muthaf***as (profane word) rather than suckahs.

Unfortunately, India was conveying through the hook of the rap song that she “beez (can typically be found) in a drug house (trap).” Trap is a slang word for drug house, a term that insiders of Hip Hop culture or those who are knowledgeable of street language would understand contextually. Her gestures unlike, most of the boys in my classroom mimicked that of Nicki Minaj with other common female dominated gestures commonly expressed by many African American female Hip Hop artists. These gestures included twisting of the hips, rolling of the eyes and neck simultaneously, and whipping and swinging hair while accenting words with in sync fingers and hand coordination.

Having danced to and rapped the song myself on previous occasions, I was frantic because I knew that India was unconsciously (possibly consciously) rapping a song that I knew that many people like parents and administrators would find “inappropriate;” especially for children. In fact, I deemed it inappropriate because I felt that the song used disrespectful terms like (Bi***).

In the moment, I was perplexed because I was uncertain of whether or not I should interrupt her to implore her not to rap the song, truthfully because I felt unequipped with the ‘correct teaching strategy’ to explain to her why the song was ‘inappropriate’ for her to rap in school without embarrassing her, indirectly devaluing a part of ‘our culture’ and subsequently ‘silencing’ her. It was indeed ‘our culture’ because

I also embraced Hip Hop and “Beez in the trap” could easily be found pulsating from the speakers of my 2013 Black GMC Terrain when I was off the school grounds. However, I could not fathom allowing my student to rap the lyrics to this song knowing that I was ethically responsible and liable for her as her teacher. Based on ways I have witnessed many people on television and in personal conversations criticize Hip Hop, I assumed that her parents, other parents, school administrators, and others would have become enraged if they felt that they were sending their child to school where they were allowed to sing “Beez in the trap.”

In the moment (a few seconds) of me rationalizing the idea of admonishing her for rapping the song, I was convicted by an abrupt, startling flashback--the ‘astronaut teacher incident’ from my elementary school days--to make what I considered to be an ethical decision, which would not devastate India. In that moment, as my personal elementary school experience of being silenced flashed before my eyes, which is detailed in the previous chapter, I was mentally transported back to the play structure pretending to be an astronaut and my elementary teacher was telling me that I could not be an astronaut and to get down from there; thus, quelling my childhood career dream.

Shaking it off and trying to dismiss my retroactive emotions so that I could deal with my emotions in that moment, I redirected my attention by snapping pictures of the two boys “beating their bongos.” As a keen observer, I simultaneously listened to India and watched her through my peripheral until she abruptly inquired, “MISTER B, you like my song?” Unhesitant, I responded, “Do you like your song?” She smiled, “Yes, I love Nicki Minaj!” Then it became clear to me that it was not solely the song that she adored but the artist; the female artist who also referred to and branded herself as “Pink Barbie.”

I gazed over at the poster of ‘positive’ Black women that I intentionally placed in the "Imagination center" to give my students examples of what I considered to be positive Black females.

Admittedly, while I admired the art of Nicki Minaj, I knew that the manner in which she presented herself through commercialism (e.g., wearing shirts showing cleavage, usage of profanity, sexually suggestive dance moves, and glaring cosmetic transformations) (Rose, 1994) was not something that I assumed my students were developmentally prepared to understand or attempt to mimic, until India’s performance enlightened me. I turned to India and said, “Mr. B doesn't want you to be in a trap. A trap is a place where people go to do (illegal) drugs and (these) drugs can make you very sick or hurt you. Realizing too late that I had not queried India to see if she knew what a “trap” was, I moved on and told her, “Let's make our own song on tomorrow.” She smiled and said, "It's gonna be better than Nicki Minaj[‘s] song!" I smiled, walking away still feeling like I could have addressed the issue more effectively but was not clear on how.

On the next morning I was ecstatic for her arrival because I was anxious to witness how my class would respond to our first ‘challenge’ of creating a class rap song. It was indeed a challenge because I had no formal training or experience constructing rap with young children ages five to six. Mustering up confidence, I involved the class in remixing the song by documenting their ideas on chart paper. I explained to the students yesterday's dilemma and we had a discussion about why talking about a “trap” or using “bad words” (profanity) was something that “good citizens” should abstain from. “Good citizenship” was a part of the South Carolina social studies standard for kindergarten and

first grade, and I had centered all classroom issues and student/teacher conduct on how we as a class defined ‘good citizenship’ earlier in the year. Our class viewed good citizenship as all the things that we do or contribute to making the world better for ourselves and others to live, discussing ways to address equity issues in the community (e.g., school funding/zoning). Concluding our conversation I asked the students, "What do you suggest that we say instead of beez in the trap?" "Hive! --Beez go in the hive; not a trap!" said one of the students joyfully. They all cheered and began singing their new hook, "Beez in the Hive, ba ba beez in the hive!" I decided to extend their song to reinforce number concepts. So I began singing "Beez in the hive, two beez in the hive" and so forth, having students role-play the number of beez to reinforce number concepts. I sent booklets that I made for students to complete with their families as reinforcement with letters to the families expressing to them how I came up with the theme “Beez.” I went on to extend the theme by also supporting the class in studying bees in science and connecting it to social studies to explore how bees help people. My parents, especially the younger parents, expressed their gratitude for my creativity through brief conversations as they picked up or brought their child to and from school. In addition, I felt empowered by Facebook users who made similar complimentary comments on my Facebook post that I made of my original, “Beez in the trap” student workbook before the students decided to remix it to “hive” (See Appendix C).

Reflection on Vignette Two

One thing that I learned from this key incident with India was that my teacher disposition could be connected to unresolved emotions and past issues that often haunt me (Lesko & Bloom, 2000). As a result of past experiences like the “astronaut incident” which was fueled by my teacher’s disposition, worldviews, perspectives, and bias, I was

compelled by my conscious to deal with my emotions of hurt, sadness, and pain while trying to teach in a “site of discomfort” (Lesko & Bloom, 2000, p. 242) to begin my self-healing process to move forward. My discomfort entailed confronting the deep, dark, hidden secrets or moments that were upsetting to recall. For instance, before writing about this, I had never mentioned this incident because I assumed that my teacher was correct about me never becoming an astronaut and I felt like a failure. Yet, what once haunted me now compelled me to change my teaching practice and forced me to make ethical decisions with the souls of my students in mind (hooks, 1994). Although I felt a sense of discomfort when reflecting on my past, I was comforted by the predicted outcome of my humility, which was being sensitive to the social and emotional development (the soul) of my students. Therefore, I was conscious of not embarrassing or devaluing their culture because I knew that this practice could harm the spirits of my students as I had been harmed. Essentially, a critical reflection of my past informed my decision-making and approaches as a teacher to abstain from reproducing “murder scenes” like the astronaut incident.

By engaging in introspection and perspective taking, I saw my students through my childhood lens and I was conscientious of ensuring that my teaching approaches did not foster a repeat of my history--my story through the lives of my students. I saw them not solely as students but first as humans with souls (hooks, 1994) whom I was responsible for nurturing. Additionally, I did not ‘see’ them as solely individuals but I saw them as a part of myself. When I looked at my students, it was a reflection of myself that I saw. I did not see a student rapping a song that was ‘inappropriate’; I saw a young soul trying to make sense of the complex world around her seeking rap as an outlet to

communicate and express her thoughts and her culture. I had to admit that I had power to control many factors in my classroom (Kincheloe, 2008). As a teacher, the power of perception (Gay, 2002) became clear, when I realized that for so long I had been taught as a Black man to subscribe to deficit narratives of Black people, Black art, and Black life (Dubois, 1903; Woodson, 1935). As a Black early childhood male teacher, it could have been the perfect time to perpetuate such deficit narratives at the entry level of the schooling process. However, I saw it as the perfect time to counter (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001) those master narratives about Black culture.

I wrote this vignette to illustrate how such subscriptions to deficit narratives of Black children could support teachers in unintentionally fostering, stifling, or truncating students' abilities to demonstrate their potential in the classroom. Teachers hold the power to "spirit murder" (Love, 2014b, April, 13:49) the souls of their students because of how their teachers' instructional practice is informed by their perceptions. I can personally attest to this because I felt like my humanity was taken from me when I was forced to not use my Hip Hop sensibilities to be innovative in the classroom. My classmates and I would ask questions regarding using popular culture (e.g., rap music, current music artists) in assignments, projects, and presentations. Oftentimes, teachers adhered to their strict and rigid criteria for classroom assignments, projects, and presentations that did not welcome what we viewed as creativity or relevant. Many of my classmates and I felt as if we could not embody and articulate our 'true selves.' Rather than my classmates and I applying our worldviews, personalities, experiences, and personal knowledge to classroom content, many of us typically put on façades in the

classroom. That is, we expressed ourselves only in ways that we felt would impress our teachers; and many of our teachers missed the opportunities to hear “our voices.”

It may be helpful that classrooms be places where students have the freedom to be innovative via the flexibility and culturally relevant nature of the classroom environment and materials. Bettina Love (2014b, April) stated in a TEDx talk, “When we deny students the opportunity to express themselves in classrooms, we are spirit murdering them.” She goes on to suggest that when we are forcing students to be someone that they are not, we are murdering their spirits. I could have easily mandated that ‘bongos’ don’t belong in the housekeeping center, or that shower cadies were not made to be bongos; thus, ‘spirit murdering’ the children’s creativity. I could have easily considered my students’ drumming as ‘noise’ and admonished them for being destructive to classroom materials, again ‘spirit murder’ their creativity. However, I understood how it felt to have a burning desire to be innovative but still be restricted and ‘spirit murdered’ by teaching practices that catapulted me into years of silence; failing to share my ideas and talents with others in school. I did not want to repeat history, so I was very cautious of how I dealt with India rapping about her habitually being in a drug house (“trap”).

Though I had strategically placed a poster I made of images that I clipped from magazines, family albums of classroom students, and staff school picture albums of whom I believed to be positive Black women, India identified Nicki Minaj as her role model. I was disappointed because I had worked so arduously to provide more of what I perceived as positive examples of role models in my classroom (e.g., posters on walls, books, classroom visits of positive Black men and women) and yet India still selected the version of Nicki Minaj that the music companies had constructed. Such disappointment is

due to my usage of the tokenism approach (Gay, 2002) or the notion that embedding cultural artifacts in my classroom would be sufficient for addressing issues of diversity. I was familiar with the version of Nicki Minaj before she became a mainstream artist (e.g., Black hair, less make up, more realistic rap lyrics) as well as her transformation as a Hip Hop artist (Blonde hair, heavy make up, rumors of breast and buttocks implants, rap lyrical content that catered primarily to the interests of most musical executives). Essentially, I strived to expose my students to the first version rather than the second version to value and appreciate the scope of realities that young children are also familiar with. Admittedly by simply having a few of what I assumed were exemplars did not preclude children from having an array of other models who did not fit my narrowly defined definition of role models. With good intentions, I unintentionally devalued the role models of my children and positioned “my role-models” as “my children’s role-models.” This may have also put me in a position to “spirit murder” (Love, 2014b, April, 13:49) or ‘involuntary manslaughter’ of what my children valued; thus, reproducing the very experiences that I disdained.

Knowing that self-identity development is a critical aspect of nurturing kindergarten and first grade students, I wanted to best support my students in knowing themselves (Akbar, 1998) rather than subscribing to the deficit narratives of society (e.g., Black females are only valued for their bodies). I was critically conscious of these narratives after having engaged in doctoral courses on Critical Theory, Critical Race Theory, Critical Pedagogy, and Culturally Relevant Pedagogy. However, I believe that teacher education must be revamped to support teachers in dealing with similar classroom dilemmas from a critical stance. This means teacher educators can engage in reflective

and transparent dialogue about the vast realities that teachers may or may not encounter and use Critical Theory, Critical Race Theory, Critical Pedagogy, and Culturally Relevant Pedagogy readings and lections as a guide to frame discussions. This also means that teacher educators must be willing to be transparent about how their worldviews and perspectives inform their decision-making as teacher educators and vice versa for school administrators and teachers.

I have come to realize that children decide whom their role models are and we as adults may be able to influence some of their decisions. We as teachers can teach the students to subscribe to positive role models but the “societal teachers” (Cortz, 1979) may still “win them over.” As teachers, we can still teach our children to be critically conscious without infringing our perspectives on them. For instance, the incident with India could have been fashioned into lessons, which taught critical literacy. I could have shown before and after pictures of Nicki Minaj and engaged in discussions about the transformation and the music industry. Perhaps, the children and their families may have been activated and mobilized to take reflective action (e.g., write to Nicki Minaj or to the recording company that represents her). Such proactive actions have the possibility of capturing the agency of children and families.

Just as any teacher who remains open to developing, I learned to become more astute in my understanding and practice of culturally relevant pedagogy. For example, when discussing “good citizenship,” I added depth to our discussions by using critical questioning (Kincheloe, 2008). When students made inquiries, I did not position myself as an omnipotent teacher. For example, Abby (a kindergartner) commented: “Mister B, my cousin keeps stealing money from my auntie. She is a ‘bad’ citizen because that is not

the “right” thing to do.” I responded with a series of questions that helped her think about the issue in multiple facets. I wanted students to think beyond the limited notions that “good citizenship” is only a matter of being ‘right’ or ‘wrong’. I posed the question to all of the students, “How do we know if a citizen is bad or good?” One of my first grade students Tron, who often appeared to be in a daze provided insight to Abby’s comment. “But-- what if your cousin needed lunch money for school but her mama was at work? She is not a “bad citizen”. She wanted to have food for lunch. I know cause my brotha did the same thing.” Then I responded, “So--different people think differently about what’s bad or what’s good because Tron, saw Abby’s cousin as not having done something ‘bad.’ To support the children in understanding different viewpoints we had discussions going back and forth between the two perspectives posed by the children. During our conversation male kindergarteners Chance and Savion began kicking one another. I asked the two boys to pay attention and participate because I had a high expectation that they shared their thoughts. I asked them, “Is someone completely bad because they make a mistake or what they believe is a wrong choice.” Chance replied, “No! Everybody ’posed to make mistakes so they can learn to do better.” Savion chimed in, “Yea cause we do good and bad things so there is no such thing as a good or bad citizen cause we are bof of dem.” Retrospectively, I perceived my students as geniuses who were capable of thinking critically and analyzing the “standardized definitions” suggested by state curriculum documents.

I also viewed my students as geniuses who were capable of being naturally innovative, so I was also seeking moments to identify and document those abilities in my classroom when I was observing my students. A teacher holding a negative personal bias

against loud ‘noise’ or a disconnection to the significance of African drumming could have interfered with student and teacher learning. I learned that sometimes we as teachers unintentionally allow our personal views, interpretations, biases, and beliefs to impede the development and growth of our students (Gay, 2002). Thus, we should consider engaging in ongoing reflection of our personal biases and teaching practices. Such reflection encouraged an appreciation for the innovative nature of my students, rather than victimizing them for “beating on plastic shower cadies” as I assumed my teachers would have done. Africans have traditionally used drumming as a form of communicating messages and Africans who were enslaved continued this communicative tradition until their enslavers realized the communicative nature of the drums and prohibited the usage of drumming (Sullivan, 2001)--though Africans improvised and manipulated their voices to serve as their ‘drums.’ I realized that my students were communicating their innovation--not ‘noise’ (Rose, 1994) through drumming and improvisation in ways that provoked me to reflect upon times when I heard ‘noise’ rather than the use and development of social-emotional skills, cognitive skills, innovation, talents, and gifts being executed. While I consider the India example as turning point for me, in the following table (Table 4.1), I present and analyze other examples from my classroom through the dimensions of culturally relevant pedagogy that served as a methodological tool for my study. The examples explicate my analysis of what made my approaches culturally relevant. Afterwards, I reflect upon a past classroom experience and how I would approach differently knowing what I know now through personal and professional experiences.

Table 4.1
Examples of CRP in our classroom

Examples From Classroom	Source of Data	Culturally Relevant Pedagogical Dimensions
Students used plastic shower cadies for bongos [Appendix A]	Observation	Conceptions of self and others CRP teachers see their pedagogy as art – unpredictable and always in the process of becoming (p.478),
India singing a “Beez in the trap” that I also played	Observation; Reflective journal entry	Conceptions of self and others CRP teachers see themselves as members of the community (p.478),
Supporting students like Abby, Chance, and Savion in critically thinking about “good citizenship” from different perspectives	Observation; Reflective journal entry	Conceptions of knowledge CRP teachers believe that knowledge must be viewed critically (p.481),
“I realized that my students were communicating their innovation--not ‘noise’ (Rose, 1994) through drumming and improvisation in ways that provoked me to reflect upon times when I heard ‘noise’ rather social-emotional skills, cognitive skills, innovation, talents, and gifts being executed (Broughton, 2016, p.11).	Classroom reflection	Conceptions of knowledge CRP teachers believed that assessment must be multifaceted, incorporating multiple forms of excellence (p.481),
Providing students a wall of large, white paper, accessible throughout the day to draw and paint their	Photograph	Conceptions of knowledge CRP teachers believed that teachers must scaffold, or

ideas, emotions and feelings through graffiti art. Providing opportunities to students share their interpretations to facilitate learning. [Appendix B]		build bridges, to facilitate learning (p.481),
Showing interest in student performances (e.g., rap cyphers) by recording student performances and cheering on students. Using video as assessment data to highlight skills, talents, and developmental domains (e.g., language development of students). [Appendix D]	Video/Photograph	Conceptions of knowledge CRP teachers believed that teachers must be passionate about knowledge and learning (p.481),
Performing Hip Hop for students using teacher and class-created raps, chants, break dances, and graffiti art to convey knowledge. [Appendix E]	Photograph	Conceptions of knowledge CRP teachers believed that teachers must be passionate about knowledge and learning (p.481),
Using rap lyrics to empower and inspire students to believe in themselves to achieve daily [Appendix F]	Personal Memory	Conceptions of self and others CRP teachers believed that all students were capable of academic success (p.478),
Recommendation letter from head school administrator [Appendix G]	Administrator Letter	Conceptions of self and others CRP teachers [see] teaching as a way to give back to the community (p.478),
Bringing in community artists and community members	Photograph	Conceptions of self and others CRP teachers [see]

to the classroom; and attending community events with students [Appendix H]		themselves as members of the community (p.478),
Reflecting upon personal experiences with teachers supported me in making the decision of not embarrassing or silencing India	Classroom Reflection	Social relations CRP teachers [demonstrate] a connectedness with all of the students (P. 480),
Using the ‘peace tree’ to support one of Hip Hop’s pioneer’s call for peace, unity, and problem solving through self-expression [Appendix I]	Photograph	Social relations CRP teachers [encourage] students to learn collaboratively and be responsible for one another (p. 480),
Grandparent of the then first grader, Enrique randomly sent me a video of Enrique, now a fifth grader reflecting upon his experience with the ‘peace tree’ to teacher education collegiate. [Appendix J]	Video/Photograph	Social relations CRP teachers [develop] a community of learners (p.480),

New dimension of CRP

While each of my examples for this study aligned with the aforementioned dimensions of culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995b), there were moments during self-reflection when my thoughts and beliefs did not conform to a dimension of CRP. Through the process of trying to make my thoughts ‘fit,’ I discovered what I believe to be a new dimension, conceptions of culturally relevant pedagogy (How teachers view and understand CRP). What we already know from the work of Ladson-

Billings (1995b; 2009) is that many teachers have misinterpreted culturally relevant pedagogy. Some teachers equated academic excellence with strategies that focused primarily on only preparing students for high stakes testing (Ladson-Billings, 2009) rather than promoting interdependent critical thinking. This and similar misinterpretations have serious implications; such as teachers perpetuating and reifying the very erroneous notions (e.g., ‘effectiveness’ one-size fits all teaching approaches) that culturally relevant pedagogy cautions against. Rather than promote and develop critical thinkers, a teacher can inadvertently reinforce passivity in learners based on their conceptions of culturally relevant pedagogy. Part of understanding and examining conceptions of culturally relevant pedagogy is self-interrogating who is culturally relevant pedagogy for?; when and if it should or can be ‘used’; is it a strategy?; do you read culturally relevant research?; is Hip Hop pedagogy your only method of being culturally relevant?; and several other questions. I pose these inquiries for consideration because just as Ladson-Billings (1995b; 2009) reported that teachers misinterpreted CRP, examples of my work using CRP in this dissertation can very well be misinterpreted by teachers and converted to their classrooms as ‘doing’ culturally relevant pedagogy with Hip Hop music on “Fun Fridays”. Ladson-Billing’s (2006) caution about an ‘education debt’ reminds us that we as educators can not afford for our children to continuously be inoculated with deficit knowledge by teachers who are ‘teaching’ what they *think* they know about CRP; and ‘doing’ what they *think* they should ‘do’ to ‘do’ CRP. This is why in the following section, I will share what I refer to as ‘the remix’ and evolution of myself as a teacher. My intent is to convey that change does not happen in one day; rather, it happens over time. Another point that I wish to make is that critical scholarship will not transform

teachers instantly. I will share a brief vignette that illustrates the progress and growth I made as a budding critical teacher. While I made forward steps to becoming more conscious, there were still aspects that I needed to address.

Vignette Three: Track Three-The Kindergarten Cypher

My first steps to transformation

Our school day ended at 2:30 pm daily and this was the beginning of what our school considered ‘after care’ hours, which ranged from 2:30-6:00 pm. Within this time period students had restroom time, water breaks, snack time, outdoor time, and center time. On this particular day, we had just come from having outdoor time, with only two students whom were waiting to be picked up to go home. One student, Tyrik decided that he would play in the imagination center. The other student, Chance chose to work in the art center. As they engaged in the centers, I decided to hang some of their paintings from earlier that day. While adorning the room with their paintings, I heard Tyrik freestyle rapping. I had never heard him rap before nor, was I used to his speaking out so boldly because he appeared to be shy most of the time. Eager to document his development with a video of him rapping, I began recording him with my cell phone. As he rapped, he walked out of the imagination center, wearing an over-sized men’s blazer that was donated to the class. Hardly looking at the camera, Tyrik continues to rap, moving his hands back and forth, crisscrossed over one another. While focusing on him, Chance, the other students left the art center with two ‘drumsticks’ and began to drum on a shelf in the block center to provided beats for Tyrik as he performs. After switching to the computer desk, which made a louder sound when he stroked it with the ‘drumsticks’, Chance pleaded, “Do me! Do me next!” requesting that I videotaped his rap performance.

Before I could turn the camera on Chance, he begins to perform his rap for me using many facial and body gestures. I asked him if he was finished and then I switched the focus back on Tyrik. This time Tyrik looked directly into the camera with a bigger smile than before. He seemed to have gained more confidence after witnessing Chance perform. They both seemed to enjoy the freedom to use the word “butt” in their raps. Though it irritated me because I thought that “butt” was an “inappropriate” word and would rather them use “bottom” instead, I remained silent. Having learned from the lesson India taught me, I did not want to interfere on their moment for creative expression and during the cypher I saw myself as the ‘student’ learning from the lyrical expressions of their reality. I really wanted to know, if provided the unrestricted freedom to rap about whatever they desired, what would they say? I believe they took full advantage of that opportunity, an opportunity that I do not recall me ever providing them in class. Could it be that I had possibly “silenced” them in some way?

Reflection on Vignette Three

Everyday while commuting home from school, I engaged in reflection about my day. Oftentimes it was difficult to confront my mistakes, or to critically examine myself. After being transparent with myself, I realized that I only relinquished my role as ‘the teacher’ to become ‘the student’ for brief moments. Some of my then approaches did not align with culturally relevant pedagogy primarily due to my total control and ownership of the class on some occasions. Admittedly, I was ethically responsible for students; thus, when I mean total control, I’m referring to not giving my students opportunities to freely express themselves, cautious of what they may say (that I may deem ‘inappropriate’). I had to get over myself and alter my mindset or what Ladson-Billings (1995b) referred to

as conceptions of self and others. Several days later, two kindergarteners decided to engage in a rap cypher. I decided to expand the time that I typically would occupy the capacity as ‘a student’ and ‘a listener’ and allow my students the freedom to share their voices. The moment that I gave my students an opportunity to unrestrictedly share their thoughts without interruption or adult intervention (i.e., censoring or disciplining them because of any ‘inappropriate’ content of their raps), my students took full advantage with pride. I was astounded at their performance and abilities to listen to one another and astutely respond with lyrics “off the top of their heads.” Rather than seeing them as solely rapping, I saw them as debaters, prolific orators, and vigilant scholars as they meticulously crafted lyrical responses amongst one another.

“Me next!” pleaded Chance, as he impatiently waited for his opportunity to perform for me. Why was he so impatient? Was he not used to having my undivided attention? Was he not used to me videotaping his performances? As painstaking as it is for me to admit, my students were not used to me giving them opportunities to create and perform Hip Hop autonomously. It was because previously I was primarily the artist (performing Hip Hop) and they were the consumers or (listeners) in the classrooms (Freire, 1970; Tzuo, 2007). However, Jenkins (2013) suggested, “Consumers are learners. Artists can be teachers” (p.13). Though, I embraced the concept of having a “student-centered classroom” which placed the interests of students at the forefront, I dealt with the tensions between my control as a teacher (the artist) and my students’ freedom in my classroom (i.e., to also be artists and not solely consumers) (Tzuo, 2007). How could I have used Hip Hop, a culture that responds to and resists oppression, in such an oppressive manner (Gosa & Fields, 2012)? Was I irresponsibly using Hip Hop (Gosa &

Fields, 2012) without having grounded the premise of my teaching practice in social justice? With no formal teacher education courses on Hip Hop pedagogy, it was easy for me to emulate what I thought was Hip Hop pedagogy to lure students into magically learning concepts, in which Gloria Ladson Billings cautioned against in the work of Hill (2009). I was more focused on getting students to learn concepts suggested by the state standards than I was on learning about the skills they already possessed (Geist & Baum, 2005), which in this case actually already demonstrated proficiency in many areas of language development (Love, 2015). This was done as students generated rhyming words in their original lyrics while changing and manipulating words to fit the flow of their raps.

This experience has taught me that children can be forced to secretly cloak their identities, thoughts, talents, and gifts from their culture if they are not allowed to freedom to express themselves through their preferred mode(s) of cultural expression. What if I had not given them an opportunity to freestyle? I would have probably lost an opportunity to enrich my student's data with a documented event (Owocki & Goodman, 2002) of their ability to master various statewide objectives, and would have lost the opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of my students. Had it not been for this experience, I probably would have been confident in my student data of Tyrik that demonstrated his shyness and emerging development in the area of language development. Thus, we as teachers may want to consider taking risks and be willing to listen to students and to provide them with opportunities to share their realities. It is then when we as teachers will be able to gage the cognitive development of students in order to challenge them and deepen their knowledge or to scaffold the students' developing

understanding of concepts. All students deserve a ‘time to shine;’ or to feel like a star. Within that moment, we should not only see it as a performance but rather a learning opportunity to help our light bulbs as teachers to ‘shine’ as we think about how might we strengthen our practice using what we now know about our students. I am now more conscious of who is primarily on ‘stage’ in the classroom (Stuber, 2007) and whether or not I am stealing my students’ “time to shine.” Students should never have to wait until after school to be themselves. More importantly, teachers should not have to wait until after care to have time to learn from them. Essentially, I learned to ‘pass the mic’ and turn down the music of my life stories and realities and to turn up to the realities expressed by my students. This work is a process! While reflecting the term “turning up” came to mind.

“Turning up” in Hip Hop means to get excited, energetic, and boisterous in individual ways. “Turn down for what?” is the response that is given when one says, “turn up,” essentially questioning the rationale for stopping the fun and excitement of turning up (turning down). With this in mind, I now attribute my ability to ‘hear’ and recognize such messages to me ‘turning down’ (not dismissing) my personal biases and beliefs to listen to them after having been ‘turned up’ to what I thought I knew; which are those “voices in my head” that I’ve internally banked in my mind throughout my life. They were the ‘voices’ that I was oblivious to until my graduate advisor and professor, Dr. Gloria Boutte, was able to troubleshoot it in my writing. From my perspective, I saw that she noticed that my writing was not focused or coherent and suggested that I learned to control extraneous voices from interfering with the message I strove to convey. She charged me to control “the voices in my head.” Inspired by her charge, I conclude this

vignette, using a rap (my expression) to illustrate how this vignette changed not only my teaching practice but also me as a person when I learned to “Turn down the voices in my head”:

“Turning down the voices in my head”

To see my students as human and to support the nurturing of their souls, I had to turn
down the voices in my head.

To hear and notice the merit in the African American Language used by my students in
the rap song, I had to turn down the voices in my head.

To hear and notice the confidence and the joy my students demonstrated when given the
opportunity to create their own work, I had to turn down the voices in my head.

To hear and understand what my students are thinking and what they valued, I had to turn
down the voices in my head.

To hear and notice the impact of oppression, society, and commercialism in the lives of
my students, I had to turn down the voices in my head.

To hear and notice the role models that my students subscribed to with the help of media
influences regardless of who I wanted them to admire, I had to turn down the voices in
my head.

To hear and understand what and how I should teach my students, I had to turn down the
voices in my head.

To hear and understand whom my students were, I had to turn down the voices in my
head.

To hear and understand who I could become as a teacher, I had to turn up the voices in
my head, question those voices, unpack those voices, cry with those voices, and silence

those voices that have silenced me. I had to deal with and transcend guilt and victimize the oppressor who created this noise, these voices that are not mine--that are not voices of my ancestors with Hip (consciousness) and Hop (movement/action) that was once turned off by the hands of the American Schooling process that functioned as the only radio station in which I was dysconsciously in tuned.

To hear and understand who I can become as a Hip Hop pedagogy scholar, I had to become the DJ of my own life story, having the power to turn up and turn down the voices in my head to connect to the rhythm of the souls of my students--my people. To give them something that they can feel, understand, and challenge--their, our education.

The type of education...

One that hears of the “trap”

One that provokes consciousness of the origins of the “trap”

One that questions and problematizes that “trap”

One that deals with notions of the “trap”

The education that unleashes the souls that have been trapped

by the trappers who “train” trap keepers in schools

to “beez in the trap” to make money and to become only money to the trappers of the

American education system.

The type of education that awakens the beez from an oppressive hibernation to recall their purpose to not be trapped but to be beez in the hive producing knowledge

like honey as early as the age of five!

Keep this movement alive even if the revolution won’t be televised.

Can you hear me now?: An analysis of “Turning down the voices”

What this means for educators is that we must get beyond ourselves! I use the word must because we can no longer afford to wait or plead; we must demand the best for our children. Thus, we must go beyond solely what we prefer, what we like, what we dislike, what we feel like doing, and what we think we know. We must confront the personal biases that inform our actions and decision-making. We must take risks and not be afraid to confront issues that may seem insurmountable. Essentially, we as educators must go against the grain and be willing to accept, understand, and present various perspectives. We must turn down the voices that we have heard and internalized throughout our lives to embrace new critical ways of thinking. Educators will not be or produce passive learners; but embody critical ways of thinking, being, and teaching. Rather than shying away from discussing and confronting difficult topics presented by students like “the trap” (drug house), we must consider analyzing the origins of “the trap,” and why “a trap” exists. Is it because those in the trap were discriminated against or lacked equitable job opportunities? We must consider the economical factors that contribute to “the trap” and name those who benefit and support it. We can create critically conscious students who will not passively fall prey to the many societal “traps” that marginalize who they are and who they can become. This work is not effortless; it will take willingness, critical reflection, and guidance from critical scholars to be prepared to respond to these issues in classroom. These issues are the realities of many of our students; and they may need our support in making meaning of those experiences. Will we continue to listen to the voices in our head that may tell us that such topics may be inappropriate or will we turn down the voices to support the critical consciousness of our students?

I have learned from the plethora of teachable moments in my class. Originally, I was experimenting with Hip Hop pedagogy because of the dearth of research regarding Hip Hop pedagogy in the context of early childhood classrooms to guide me. Through an analytical analysis of my experiences in the classroom, I was able to highlight what I found to be essential components (see Table 4.2) for teachers of young children to consider when fostering Hip Hop in their classrooms.

Table 4.2

Essential components of Hip Hop pedagogy in Early Childhood Education

Essential Components	Examples of Hip Hop Pedagogy in My Classroom	Rationale
Dimensions of Hip Hop	I believed that Hip Hop consisted of elements rather than only music. Thus, in my classroom children also engaged in graffiti writing, break-dancing, and rap cyphers.	How teachers perceive or understand Hip Hop and Hip Hop pedagogy could maximize or minimize potential learning experiences and cultural communication modalities of students. Teachers can engage in ongoing scholarship and professional development to deepen their knowledge.
Conceptions of self and others (Ladson-Billings, 1995b)	I saw my children as competent and eager learners and ‘teachers’ who had a voice worthy of hearing. In my eyes, Hip Hop was not ‘too adult-like’ for them because I supported the individuality and culture of my students. Some children could free-style (word play) and others were better at graffiti writing. Importantly, many of the children were	Oftentimes teachers come from the paradigm of <i>Developmentally Appropriate Practices</i> , believing that Hip Hop is inappropriate for young children. Instead, teachers should consider the genre of rap (e.g., conscious rap), and type of Hip Hop, cultural and individual interests of children. All children do not have to rap to engage in Hip Hop the same ways.

	spontaneously engaging in Hip Hop. I also learned that I had much to learn also.	
Critical reflection and risk taking	I reflected daily on my teaching approaches and realized I had too much control in my class. One day, I decided to take a risk and allow my students to experience dee-jaying. I provided them opportunities to be class dee-jays by taking turns using our class CD 'boom box'. The students demonstrated many academic and personal skills.	Students learned responsibility and took ownership of our class CD boom box. Through the dee-jay experience, children learned to be attentive to the musical preferences of their peers in order to tailor the music. They used different songs to encourage different moods, feelings, and emotions.
Reciprocal teaching	I learned through self-critique that there should be a balance between student performances and teacher performances. Performance is an artistic way to convey a message or content.	To maximize learning experiences, teaching and learning should be reciprocal (Friere, 1970). Teachers and students can engage in co-generative dialogues (Emdin, 2010)
Align Hip Hop pedagogy with CRP	I was able to focus on the three key dimensions of Culturally Relevant Teaching (academic achievement, cultural competence, and critical consciousness) using Hip Hop Pedagogy.	When engaging in Hip Hop pedagogy teachers may want to consider the following questions inspired by (Ladson-Billings, 1995a): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Am I fostering academic excellence? • Am I fostering cultural competence? • Am I fostering critical consciousness?

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If yes, how? If not, how might I?
Support children's development with Hip Hop through multiple domains	<p>Developmental domains examples:</p> <p>Social-Emotional: Students express emotions through rap with their peers.</p> <p>Physical: Students engage in breakdancing by performing 'complex' moves.</p> <p>Cognitive: Students interpret and communicate thoughts with graffiti writing.</p> <p>Language: Students engage in 'word play' as they rap and exchange lyrical ideas.</p>	<p>Since teachers are nurturing the souls of young children, consideration can be made to supporting their development. Rather than only viewing Hip Hop as an instructional approach or tool, teachers could consider it as a way to support physical development. Hip Hop pedagogy could be used to support the development of children. It could also be used to harm them if used in a way that does not align with culturally relevant pedagogy.</p>

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND CONCLUSION

“They try to hide what’s going on and we tell it like it is.”

-Eazy E, *Straight Outta Compton*

In this chapter I provide a summation and discussion of the findings of the study. Additionally, I provide implications for teachers and teacher educators, and school administrators as well as recommendations for future research. I also provide my own research trajectory. Lastly, I conclude with a summation of final thoughts and reflections from my study using Hip Hop.

Discussion

As a teacher and a life-long learner, I continuously reflect upon my educational experiences using self-interrogating questions such as, “How can I improve the issues that I faced during my schooling to make educational experiences better for the students I teach?” In my kindergarten-first grade class, I wanted the best experiences for my children wished that they could achieve the type of academic excellence, cultural competence, and critical consciousness that Ladson-Billings (1994, 1995a, 1995b, 2009) explained. My quest to improve students’ school experiences was impelled by a desire to ‘pay on’ what Ladson-Billings (2006) has referred to as an educational debt. Ladson-Billings’ (2006) examination of this debt suggested that the educational system in the U.S. has failed to provide or meet the academic, social, and personal needs of students of color. Thus, I questioned, “How are teachers conceptualizing culturally relevant

pedagogy and Hip Hop pedagogy? What does CRP and HHP look like for teachers who have embraced this approach with young children?

There is an abundance of research on ‘academic achievement’, which compares the performance of African American and White American students. While much of it suggests that African American students are underperforming (e.g., Paige & Witty, 2010), other findings (Boutte, 2015; Foster, 1998; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Siddle-Walker, 1996) which focus on teachers who use culturally relevant pedagogy with African American students have demonstrated that these students perform well academically. Hence, this paradox assured me that Black children can achieve if taught in relevant ways. However, (channeling the sentiments of the actor who portrayed “Eazy-E” (rapper) in the movie, *Straight Outta Compton* (Ice Cube, Woods-Wright, Alvarez, Gray, Bernstein, Dr. Dre, 2015), “They [White Americans in power and media] try to hide what’s going on [social, racial, economic injustices] and we tell it like it is [share their actual experiences through rap].” In my study, I decided to “tell it like it is,” developing into a teacher who embraced Hip Hop pedagogy in my classroom. If others had told my story, they equated Hip Hop pedagogy to ‘having fun.’ Hence, I employed autoethnographic methodology so that I could tell my own story in a way that made sense to me and in a way that complemented the flexible and dynamic nature of Hip Hop. What I learned from Boutte (2015), Ladson-Billings (1994; 1995a; 1995b; 2009), and Long, Souto-Manning, & Vasquez (2015) is that there is much that can be learned from

the authentic perspectives, stories, reflections, and experiences of African American teachers and students.

In the following section, I will detail implications for teachers, teacher educators, and school administrators. I will address the question, “What does the findings of my study suggest for teachers, teacher educators, and school administrators?” Then, I will provide recommendations for further research (including my future scholarship).

Implications

Implications for Teachers

Check yo’ self (Matias, 2013): Critical reflection and self-interrogation as a method. Prior to this study, I could only see the ‘good’ in my usage of Hip Hop pedagogy. Without autoethnography as a research method, I was not positioned to critically analyze my practice. Thus, I became equipped to deal with ‘the good, the bad, and the ugly.’ Although teacher reflection is essential, oftentimes teachers may only reflect within their comfort zones. Many would rather not have to experience the emotion and life changing circumstances that come along with critically reflecting and self-interrogation. A key aspect of this study was critical reflection, which entailed my not only reflecting but interrogating my thoughts, actions, words, and how they impacted my students.

Teachers should consider confronting themselves; their past, present, and future. In the study, I realized that much of my past (‘good’ and ‘bad’) impacted my teaching approach and how I viewed my students (Gay, 2002). For instance, having experienced public schooling and graduating high school with a sense of unpreparedness for college impacted my teaching approach. Because of that past experience, I made a firm

commitment to help students understand how the content we were learning could translate into their daily and future lives (Emdin, 2010). Research findings have demonstrated that many teachers are unintentionally racist (King, 1991) and oftentimes stereotype African American students (Hyland, 2005). These unfortunate issues are both driven by past experiences that teachers must be willing to confront through critical reflection. What this means is that other teachers may benefit from engaging in autoethnographic work. This type of research may help them examine their practice but also examine their lives in ways that could transform their teacher identity and practice. Since autoethnography is as rigorous as other methodologies, teachers may find scholarship such as (Chang, 2008; Lichtman, 2013; Muncey, 2010; Reed-Danahay, 1997; Roulston, 2010; Patton, 2002) useful.

By building a sense of community among one another, teachers can create and foster a 'space' or a time to reflect upon their experiences collectively--free of judgment. Teachers can provide feedback, suggestions, or even share how they have addressed situations. Weekly group discussions consisting of five to eight teachers by grade level pairs (K-1, 2nd and 3rd grade, etc.) may provide a starting place for teachers to reflect beyond their comfort zones and to begin to see issues regarding their practice and approaches from a different perspective. Teachers in grade level pairs may be able to inform each other on aspects of pedagogy that should be considered based on their experience with their particular grade level. Each group should have a captain who will be responsible of keeping the group on task and a recorder who will record the groups' perspectives, ideas, and plans. The groups can converge at a staff meeting to present their Hip Hop pedagogical action and insights to the entire school staff. If teachers are not

working together to reflect and support one another, they cannot expect students to do the same.

Words as a tool of power. The words “You can’t be an astronaut” still permeate my thoughts daily as I gaze into the sky still inquisitive and infatuated about wonders beyond the skies. What I discovered through my study was that the words of my teacher were so powerful that they impacted me both in negative and positive ways throughout my adulthood. Teachers must select their words wisely, with intention, and with the care of their students’ souls in mind. Students in my class ‘bought into’ whatever I said on most occasions about who I said they could become and what they could do, through my inspirational raps. The words, “You can be anything you want to be!” from my recorded rap *Good Day* (Broughton, 2015) that my children listened to daily, was inspired by my teacher who ‘murdered’ my dream of being an astronaut.

Teacher beliefs. During the study, I found that what I said to students was driven by what I believed (Berry, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 1995a, 1995b). Since I believed in the ‘possibilities’ of my students, it was effortless for me to say, “You can be anything you want to be!” Thus, teachers must begin to examine not only their words and the impact their words have on their students but also what they believe as teachers. This may contribute to academically successful and mentally healthy students (social-emotional development).

While teachers hold power with words, they hold power in general in their classrooms (Kincheloe, 2008). The study revealed that when my power or dominance of classroom teaching and learning was shifted to the students, essential learning experiences were amplified. That is, when power was shared with my students, and

students also had time to perform and share their perspectives, it transformed the learning environment from *my* classroom to *our* classroom. As a teacher/student, I learned more information about the identities, perspectives, and lives of the students in ways that informed and improved my instructional approach. Thus, teachers must be willing to share ‘their’ classroom power with students (Kincheloe, 2008). Through such experiences teachers may learn and gain an appreciation for the cultures of their students because students will be ‘allowed’ to teach others about who they are through the sharing of their worldviews using modalities like Hip Hop pedagogy.

Implications for Teacher Educators

Hip Hop pedagogy? How do you ‘do’ that? While I have much appreciation for teacher educators and my teacher education experience, my study revealed moments when I felt unprepared to address certain issues in my classroom as a result of using Hip Hop pedagogy. My intention is not to vilify teacher educators but to inspire a shift in thinking that may promote more evolving pedagogies. That is, teacher educators should encourage their students to experiment with pedagogies that continue to evolve and builds on current and dynamic knowledge bases.

Teacher educators should support prospective and in-service teachers in engaging reflection beyond their comfort zone. Often, teacher educators encourage teacher candidates to reflect upon their pre-service teaching experiences, but may not help them identify the impact their identities have on instruction. Hence, candidates may erroneously attribute negative academic student outcomes to the ‘inabilities’ of the students (Hyland, 2005). Acknowledging that students play a role in their academic outcomes, at the same time, teacher preparation programs should emphasize the need to

teacher candidates to critically unpack and analyze their practices. This means that teacher educators also have to model this type of critical reflection in their own classrooms.

Conceptions of Hip Hop. Hip Hop is not a new phenomenon. However, it is a subculture and a global phenomenon that the current and previous generations embrace and communicate through (Chang, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 2014; Paris, 2014). Many teacher educators are unfamiliar with Hip Hop or unable to embrace or connect with it. Many may not see its educational merits and may view it as ‘noise’ (Rose, 1994). What this means is that the likelihood of Hip Hop pedagogy being discussed in the classrooms of those teacher educators are slim to none--which also suggests that teacher candidates who will enter rapidly changing classrooms of divergent students may not be equipped to understand or respond to subcultures and multiple literacies like Hip Hop that many of 21st students are familiar with. Hence, without being familiar with the body of knowledge on Hip Hop, teachers may victimize students for ‘underperforming academically’ without considering their own (teachers’) unpreparedness (Matias, 2013) to learn from, effectively teach and communicate with these students.

Professional development. Teacher educators must be willing to grow, to learn, and to enhance their pedagogies. Teacher educators will have to go beyond conventional textbook information to learn about the needs, interests, and issues of the current and generations. Thus, teacher educators must engage in new types of professional development. They must not only ‘attend’ academic conferences and ‘read’ articles, but also ‘engage’ in spoken word events, Hip Hop music and concerts, dialogue with youth, and conversations centered on pedagogies that support social change like Hip Hop

pedagogy. Teacher educators cannot effectively teach what they do not know or understand. For instance, teachers cannot be expected to view their instruction as an opportunity to counter hegemony (dominance of power) when teacher educators are embracing dominant narratives like “don’t smile until Christmas” and advocating for ‘talk-free’ classrooms. The bottom line is that teacher educators should encourage teacher candidates to include the voices of the students they teach and to be flexible in strategies and approaches that are used. If conventional ways of teaching are not effective, teachers will need to adopt dispositions, which allow them to find what works for the students whom they teach.

Implications for School Administrators

Beliefs of school administrators. Admittedly, I was a bit reluctant to embrace Hip Hop pedagogy in my classroom of first graders and kindergarteners because I was uncertain of how my school administrator would perceive my approach. My study revealed that my head school administrator saw me as a “stellar educator” who “is making an impact on our field [early childhood education]” (See evaluation in APPENDIX G). The head school administrator also reported “He [MISTER B] created an environment for those five year olds that put them on an on-going track to success.” I do not take these observations or perspectives lightly. What I have learned is that my head school administrator at the time believed in me like I believed in my students. She saw the ‘possibilities’ (Boutte, 2015) of my pedagogy and allowed me to be who I was in my classroom without reserve. I was ‘allowed’ to use Hip Hop pedagogy in my classroom because my head administrator was convinced that whatever I used in my

classroom was at the best interest of my children and would be evident in positive academic and social outcomes.

What this suggests is that school administrators must ‘know’ and believe in their teachers—and provide support when necessary. In order for school administrators to ‘know’ their teachers, they must also be willing to embody the role of students. My head school administrator took the time to hear my stories and learn about my worldviews and my educational philosophy. She went beyond an interview and a mock lesson plan and entered into my personal world. It was then when I believed that she ‘knew’ that I had the best interest of my students. School administrators must know that teachers have the best interest of their students. Otherwise, we risk deepening the ‘education debt’ (Ladson-Billings, 2006) and perpetuate the school to prison pipeline (Noguera, 2013). Teachers who have the best interest of their students embrace approaches like Hip Hop pedagogy to promote academic excellence, cultural competence, and critical consciousness (Ladson-Billings, 1995a) rather than ‘having fun’ (although you can do both simultaneously).

Professional development. It is important for school administrators to engage in and to provide opportunities for teachers (and themselves) ongoing professional development in various contexts such as conferences, workshops, and discussions. Both school administrators and teachers benefit from being exposed to critical scholarship to gain knowledge that will support them in understanding Hip Hop pedagogy, culturally relevant pedagogy, and the role of teachers in creating social change. Without critical scholarship, school administrators may also fall prey to victimizing *students* and families for ‘academic underperformance’. School administrators may benefit from engaging in

divergent forms of workshops, such as inviting Hip Hop scholars (including teachers who embrace Hip Hop pedagogy) to their schools to model and discuss Hip Hop pedagogy. It is opportunities like this that may provoke critical reflection of school administrators as they learn from the stories of others. However, these opportunities for growth can be diminished if administrators hold negative views about Hip Hop and are not willing to embrace pedagogies that reflect and respond to the worldviews of at least one culture other than their own. Nevertheless, teachers can still experience professional development opportunities through personal reading of critical scholarship and conferences that address CRP/HHP.

Administrators must understand, appreciate, and affirm Hip Hop and the possibilities of Hip Hop pedagogy in their schools. First, administrators must see the educational merit of Hip Hop. They must recognize the holistic impact that Hip Hop pedagogy can have on students like fostering social-emotional, cognitive, language, and physical development (Love, 2015). As students are interacting with one another many of them are also developing critical thinking skills and team building (Love, 2015). Some teachers have reported favorable results with their students when they aligned Hip Hop pedagogy and state and national standards with their curriculum (Boutte, 2015; Ladson-Billings, 1995a; Long, 2011; Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2002). Thus, administrators can use the findings from the aforementioned works to learn more about the effectiveness of Hip Hop pedagogy and ways Hip Hop pedagogy could be embraced in their schools. Finally, my dissertation and personal work with Hip Hop pedagogy can be shared with administrators so that they can see the process, passion, and pedagogy that also led to favorable outcomes in my classroom. Other teachers may be inspired to ‘remix’ their

teaching approaches having read about how I ‘remixed’ myself and my teaching approaches with Hip Hop pedagogy. In the next section, I provide recommendations for future research to extend and proliferate scholarship regarding Hip Hop pedagogy/culturally relevant pedagogy.

Further Research

While there is a dearth of research regarding Hip Hop pedagogy in kindergarten-first grade classrooms, this dissertation invigorated and illustrated *my* story as a Black male K-1 teacher as research. Through an autoethnographic analysis of my teaching practices, I gained a new appreciation for the experiences and key moments that defined my teacher identity (who I am and who I was). The study revealed not only how I used Hip Hop pedagogy, but experiences and overarching beliefs that lead to it. Additionally, while I examined my practices and my beliefs, I learned a great deal about the worldviews, abilities, and beliefs of my students. Since other teachers and school administrators may benefit from such research, in the following section I propose recommendations for extending my research and generating future research with the limitations of my study in mind.

Research Recommendations

After receiving a video clip from a grandparent of one of my former K-1 students of him explaining the benefit of the ‘peace tree’ (a type of cypher) in solving social problems in the then K-1 classroom, I realized that we can learn much from following students as they matriculate through elementary, middle, and high school. My dissertation did not examine the impact of Hip Hop pedagogy over time. Thus, I recommend that researchers follow students across several grade levels to analyze their progress and how

and if Hip Hop pedagogy still impacts them. Research studies can also examine how the ways children made meaning of Hip Hop pedagogy in K-1 evolved or changed over time. Such studies will speak to the viability and dynamic nature of Hip Hop pedagogy in early childhood classrooms.

Knowing how my schooling experiences impacted my beliefs about teaching, knowledge, and others as revealed in my study, I recommend that other teachers conduct autoethnographic studies on their schooling experiences and the schooling experiences of African American students and teachers. Such research may provide a historical context for why teachers believe what they believe and how their beliefs impact their teaching and social relations with their students. Additionally, there is much that we can learn from the lives and experiences of others such as, how they approached situations and what their processes of change and personal development entailed. Such research may support teacher's conceptions of CRP as a process rather than a strategy for teaching culturally and linguistically diverse students.

Since Hip Hop comprises of elements such as break-dancing, emceeing, and graffiti writing, future research can focus on individual studies on how each element of Hip Hop is embraced in Hip Hop pedagogical settings and the social and academic impact of each. While much of my study focused on rapping, cyphers, and word play, I believe a closer examination on how young children communicate and make meaning of the ideas of others through graffiti art/writing would reveal more knowledge about Hip Hop pedagogy and language development for young learners. Additionally, by analyzing the moves that children perform during break-dancing and how and why they select those

moves could also deepen our understanding of cognitive development and how and if Hip Hop pedagogy supports critical thinking through movement.

While social activism is an essential aspect of Hip Hop pedagogy/Culturally relevant pedagogy, there are few studies that examine how such activism looks in the context of early childhood classrooms. Some teachers have begun taking activism approaches by sharing their personal stories with children about the social injustices they have experienced (Simmons, Carpenter, Ricks, Walker, Parks, & Davis, 2013).

Storytelling is an essential aspect of Hip Hop pedagogy which provides students with opportunities to communicate their cultural worldviews, opinions, beliefs, ideas, and language ‘their way’ (Love, 2015). Teachers can accomplish this by supporting and affirming Hip Hop communities of practices in their classroom, which consists of spaces in which children are able to communicate through Hip Hop culture. More research is needed to explore what Hip Hop communities of practices entail with young learners. Such research may support teachers in learning from their children and develop social relations with them in ways that support academic success (Ladson-Billings, 1995b).

While engaging in social activism can be challenging for some teachers who deflect with complaints about administrative constraints, there are other teachers who have circumvented such challenges (Simmons, Carpenter, Ricks, Walker, Parks, & Davis, 2013). One strategy is to use literature such as Long (2011) and Boutte (2015) to explore ways in which some teachers have been creative with culturally relevant pedagogy in ways that allowed them to be successful with their students in lieu of restraints. Engaging in literature and hearing the stories of other teachers may also empower teachers to maintain their commitment to social justice in their classrooms.

I recommend that studies be conducted on female teachers who embrace Hip Hop pedagogy in their classrooms. While I am a male and my dissertation is written from the perspective of a male, Hip Hop itself is dominated by the voices of males (Rose, 1994). How are female teachers embracing and conceptualizing Hip Hop pedagogy? How are the students in their classroom embracing Hip Hop from a feminine (or masculine for some females) perspective? Since, females dominate the field of early childhood education, it may be beneficial to examine how a male-dominated subculture is translated into their classrooms to support learning. Without tapping into the voices of female teachers who embrace Hip Hop pedagogy, we are reifying the notion of Hip Hop as being for males (Love, 2013, 2015).

Lastly, I recommend that researchers examine the role and impact of gender and identity in Hip Hop pedagogy (Love, 2011) in early childhood settings to include Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ). How are young children making meaning of their genders and identities through Hip Hop pedagogy? Are there male students who view female rapper Nicki Minaj as their role-models? Does that have an impact on their identity development? How do parents and administrators react to teachers who ‘allow’ a male student to perform gendered Hip Hop such as *Beez in the trap* using the gestures of Nicki Minaj similar to India in my study?

Conclusion

As customary in Hip Hop and in alignment with the nature of my study, I convey my concluding thoughts in the form of rap and graffiti art (Figure 5.1). I entitled my concluding thoughts as, *Evolution*.

Evolution

“Silence!” Keep your mouth shut, listen to the rules

follow directions, learn to be a fool.

Don’t ask questions; do what I say

Most of my teachers didn’t play.

Some taught me love and some killed my dreams,

Some robbed my culture with American dreams.

“Silence!” Keep your mouth shut, listen to the rules

follow directions, learn to be a fool.

Write and speak like the White folks do.

Learn their history each day in school.

I made A’s and B’s but I lost my C

the cultural competence to understand me.

But one day I decided to pick up a mic,

Enlivened by Hip Hop to join the fight.

The fight for social justice, the fight to be myself,

I saw Hip Hop like books on a shelf.

I Thought I brought Hip Hop to my class

It was already there to be unmasked
When I handed the mic to students one day
They transformed my life by what they had to say.
They have a message; we need to hear their voice
We can make a difference, but it's our choice.
“Silence!” Keep your mouth shut, listen to the rules
follow directions, learn to be a fool.
Turn that noise off, no Hip Hop in school.
Don't tell your story, it's a dangerous tool.
So, I told my story in my dissertation
Felt like I was typing a recitation.
Had dreams of becoming an astronaut
A school murderer said, “No you not!”
Yet she was a teacher, but they didn't teach her
that a little Black boy would be come a preacher.
Preaching HHP, that saved my life,
Writing scriptures in a bible through graffiti write.

Examined my life to see the good and bad,

Tried to hide the truth but it was all I had.

Autoethnography was how I begun to share life

Coming Straight Outta K-1

So listen, take heed to words that you've read

I made it out with CRP, but others are dead.

[Drops mic, exits stage]



Figure 5.1. Graffiti art depicting a silenced boy who embodies a worldview, confidence, culture, innovation, talent, academic excellence, ideas, passion, love, and music although according to the educational system he is academic incompetent (blank paper).



Figure 5.2. Straight Outta K-1 logo

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APPENDIX A- STUDENTS BEATING ON 'BONGOS'

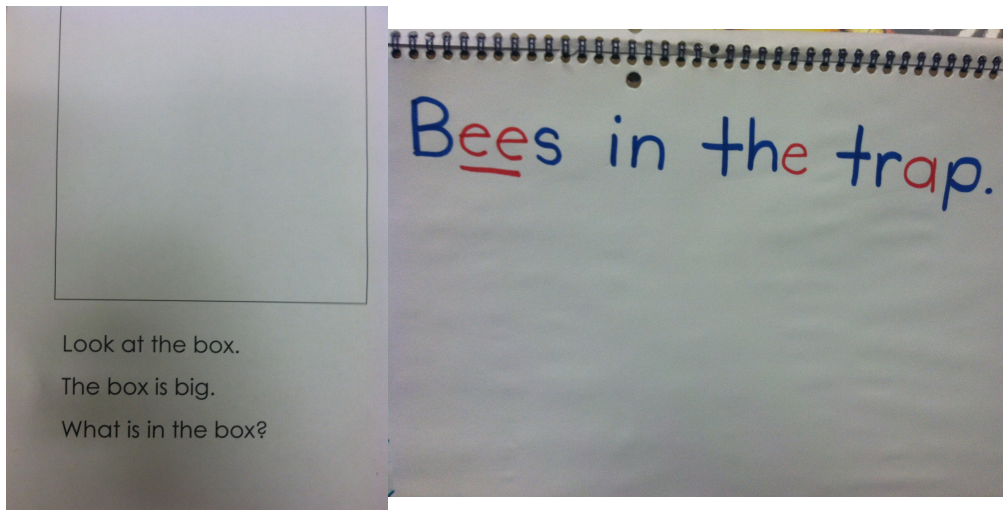
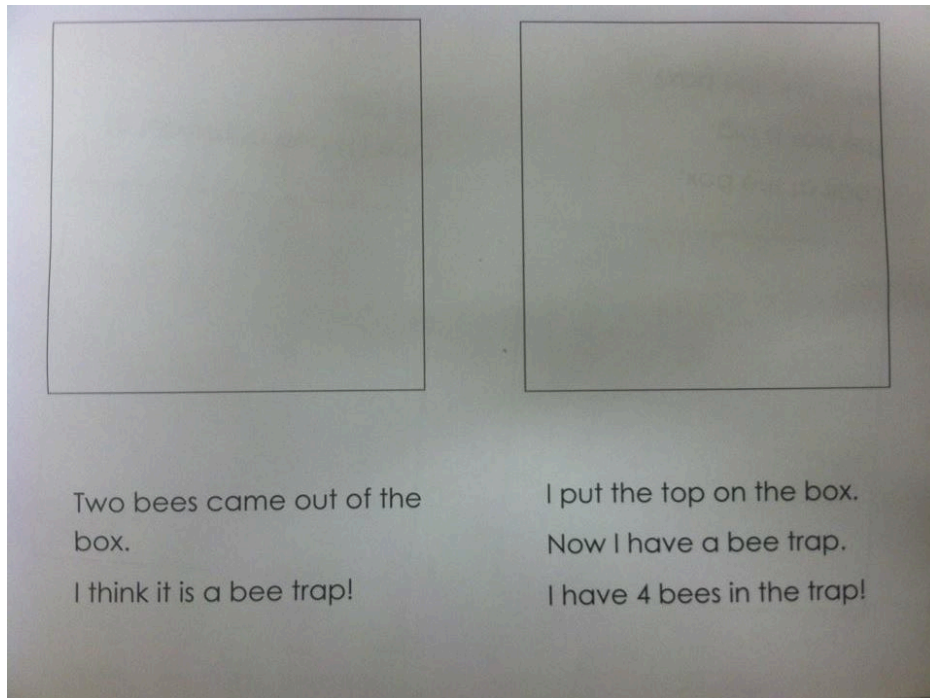


*Due to confidentiality the faces of these children will not be shown.

APPENDIX B-STUDENT GRAFITTI WRITING BOARD



APPENDIX C- BEEZ IN THE HIVE MATH WORKBOOK



APPENDIX D- TEACHER SHOWING INTEREST IN STUDENTS



Due to confidentiality the faces of these children will not be show

APPENDIX E- MISTER B PERFORMING WITH STUDENTS



APPENDIX F- INSPIRATIONAL RAP MADE BY ANTHONY BROUGHTON

Good day Rap- MISTER B

Today will be an awesome day

Be mindful of what you do and say

Listen carefully. Follow directions

Make mistakes. Make corrections

Participate. Be involved.

If there's a problem make sure you resolve

Think before you make decisions. Do your best with much precision

Solve your problems.

Talk it out.

Teamwork is what it's all about.

Listen when someone is speaking.

Take turns, be honest, no cheating.

Share and don't be a keeper.

It's not yours. It belongs to the teacher.

If someone hits you, don't hit them back.

It makes things worse, now that's a fact.

Use your words. Say how you feel.

Talk about your problems and keep it real.

You can be anything you wanna be.

If you put your mind to it, you'll see.

Believe in yourself.

I know you can!

If you fall down get back up and stand.

Stand strong, tall and proud.

Be yourself and make sure that you don't follow the crowd.

Have a good day.

APPENDIX G- LETTER FROM HEAD SCHOOL ADMINISTRATOR

May 24, 2012

Office of Educator Certification, Recruitment and Preparation
3700 Forest Drive #500
Landmark II Building
Columbia, South Carolina 29204

Dear Office of Educator Certification, Recruitment and Preparation:

It is my pleasure to write to you on behalf of Anthony Broughton regarding the renewal of his teaching license. Mr. Broughton graduated from our program three years ago and has completed his master's degree in Divergent Learning and is currently seeking a doctorate in Early Childhood Education.

He is a stellar educator and is making an impact on our field. Even as a student, he was able to make extraordinary connections between theory and practice. He has a strong conceptual knowledge base in the fields of Early Childhood Education and Elementary Education. As he continues to build this knowledge base his impact on children's learning continues to soar.

Mr. Broughton taught Kindergarten at the Benedict College Child Development Center during the 2010-2011 school year. He created an environment for those five year olds that put them on an on-going track of success. In fact, his impact on the children and the other teachers in our program has been phenomenal. He is also the Unit Coordinator for our Early Childhood program. Parents of his kindergartners approached me last spring to consider adding first grade and allowing Mr. Broughton to loop up with his children. He has taught first grade this year (2011-2012) with extraordinary success.

I have been in teacher education for over thirty-five years and have been responsible for programs that certified hundreds of candidates in early childhood and elementary education. Mr. Broughton is in the top 2% of teachers that I have observed. It is something that he takes very seriously and he works tirelessly to make a difference.

APPENDIX H- GUEST ARTIST FROM COMMUNITY SPEAKING WITH CHILDREN



APPENDIX I- CHILDREN AT THE PEACE TREE



APPENDIX J- PICTURE OF VIDEO TEXT SENT FROM GRANDPARENT OF
FORMER STUDENT



APPENDIX K- EARLY LEARNING STANDARDS CHECKLIST

Directions: Please indicate the standards that you have observed children meet by checking the appropriate standard.

Good Start Grow Smart Early Learning Standards

Approaches to Learning

- AL1.1** – Show creativity and imagination using materials in representational play.
- AL1.2** – Demonstrate increasing ability to identify and take appropriate risks in order to learn and demonstrate new skills.
- AL2.1** – Show curiosity in an increasing variety of activities, tasks, and learning centers.
- AL2.2** – Demonstrate eagerness and interest as a learner by questioning and adding ideas.
- AL2.3** – Demonstrate delight or satisfaction when completing a task, solving a problem, or making a discovery.
- AL3.1** – Demonstrate growing initiative in selecting and carrying out activities.
- AL3.2** – Show increasing ability to maintain interest in self-selected activities and play despite distractions and interruptions.
- AL3.3** – Show ability to focus attention for increasing variety of chosen tasks and activities for short periods of time (10-20 minutes).
- AL4.1** – Understand a task can be accomplished through several steps.
- AL4.2** – Demonstrate an increasing ability to organize actions and materials in the learning environment.
- AL4.3** – Demonstrate an increasing ability to follow through with tasks and activities.
- AL4.4** – Try to solve problems encountered in play.
- AL5.1** – Represent prior events and personal experiences in one or more ways.
- AL5.2** – Demonstrate increasing ability to use prior knowledge to understand new experiences.
- AL5.3** – Reason about events, relationships, or problems.
- AL5.4** – Demonstrate growing ability to predict possible outcomes based on prior experiences and knowledge.

English/Language Arts

- PK-C1.1** – Begin using appropriate voice level, phrasing, and sentence structure (syntax), and intonation when speaking.
- PK-C1.2** – Begin taking turns in conversations and staying on topic.
- PK-C1.3** – Begin responding in complete sentences.
- PK-C1.4** – Begin participating in conversations and discussions and responding appropriately.
- PK-C1.5** – Begin participating in choral speaking of short poems and rhymes, songs, and stories with repeated patterns.
- PK-C1.6** – Begin participating in creative dramatics.
- PK-C1.7** – Begin using oral language for a variety of purposes.
- PK-C1.8** – Continue using oral language for a variety of purposes.
- PK-C2.1** – Begin following one- and two-step oral directions.
- PK-C2.2** – Begin listening to various types of literature read aloud.
- PK-C2.3** – Begin listening for meaning in conversations and discussions.
- PK-C3.1** – Begin recognizing non-print sources.
- PK-C3.2** – Begin making connections between materials from non-print sources and his or her prior knowledge, other sources, and the world.
- PK-R1.1** – Begin showing an interest in reading-related activities, such as looking at books during free-choice time, talking about books, and recalling details by looking at pictures.
- PK-R1.2** – Begin exploring books independently.
- PK-R1.3** – Begin recognizing the association between spoken and written words.
- PK-R1.4** – Begin making connections to prior knowledge, other texts, and the world in response to texts read aloud.
- PK-R1.5** – Begin retelling stories.
- PK-R1.6** – Begin recalling details in texts read aloud.
- PK-R1.7** – Begin asking and answering questions about texts read aloud.
- PK-R1.8** – Begin using pictures and words to make predictions about stories read aloud.
- PK-R2.1** – Begin identifying characters in stories read aloud.
- PK-R3.1** – Begin recognizing environmental print such as business logos and traffic signs.
- PK-R3.2** – Begin understanding how print is organized and read using concepts about print.
- PK-R3.3** – Begin identifying places where words are found, such as books and newspapers.
- PK-R3.4** – Begin recognizing that words are made up of letters and that letters make sounds.
- PK-R3.5** – Begin recognizing letter patterns in words.
- PK-R3.6** – Begin recognizing rhyming words.
- PK-RS1.1** – Begin asking how and why questions about a topic of interest.
- PK-RS2.1** – Begin identifying pictures and charts as sources of information.
- PK-RS3.1** – Begin organizing and classifying information by constructing categories.
- PK-RS3.2** – Begin organizing information on the basis of observation.
- PK-RS3.3** – Begin presenting his or her research findings in a variety of formats.
- PK-W1.1** – Begin choosing topics and generating ideas about which to write.
- PK-W1.2** – Begin writing using a variety of formats.
- PK-W1.2.1** – Begin using oral language, pictures, and/or letters to create stories about experiences, people, objects, and events.
- PK-W2.1** – Begin using oral language, drawing pictures, and/or using letters to explain.
- PK-W3.1** – Begin responding to texts read aloud by conversing with others, drawing pictures, and writing letters or words.
- PK-W4.1** – Begin copying or printing letters and words, including his or her name.

Mathematics

- A.I.A.1** – Recognize patterns in their environment by color, shape, and size.
- A.I.A.2** – Order three objects by size.
- A.I.B.1** – Recognize a two-part pattern and extend.
- D.I.A.1** – Collect data related to familiar experiences by counting.
- D.I.B.1** – Sort and classify by a single attribute (color, shape, size).
- D.I.C.1** – Draw a picture to represent data.
- G.I.A.1** – Identify, name, model, and draw two-dimensional geometric shapes (circle, square, triangle, rectangle).
- G.I.A.2** – Investigate three-dimensional shapes in informal settings.
- G.I.A.3** – Sort two-dimensional shapes according to attributes.
- G.I.C.1** – Investigate the results of combining and partitioning geometric shapes (square, rectangle, triangle, circle).
- G.II.A.1** – Use positional words to describe the location of objects (up, down, on, off, over, under).
- G.IV.D.1** – Locate geometrical shapes in the environment.
- M.I.A.1** – Identify, by picking them up, which of two objects is heavier.
- M.I.A.2** – Demonstrate (through conversation) a beginning sense of time (yesterday, today, and tomorrow).
- M.I.B.1** – Uses basic comparison words (e.g. "His truck is bigger than mine".)
- M.I.C.1** – Use nonstandard linear measure (fingers, hands, feet, and arms) to explore everyday objects.
- M.I.D.1** – Identify the instrument used to measure time (clock).
- N.O.I.C.1** – Determine more than, less than, and equals based on counts using manipulatives (more, less, same number).
- N.O.I.E.1** – Distinguish "one" from "many."

Physical Development and Health

- PD1.1** – Move with balance and control while walking, running, jumping, marching, hopping, and galloping.
- PD1.2** – Coordinate movements to perform more complex tasks.
- PD2.1** – Use strength and control to perform more complex tasks.
- PD2.2** – Use hand-eye coordination to perform more complex tasks.
- PD2.3** – Show beginning control of drawing and writing tools.
- PD3.1** – Perform some self-care tasks independently.
- PD3.2** – Follow basic health rules most of the time.
- PD3.3** – Follow basic safety rules most of the time.
- PD3.4** – Demonstrate adequate stamina and strength for program activities.

Science

- A5-S.1** – Use five senses to explore what one can see, hear, touch, taste, or smell.
- A5-S.2a** – Demonstrate skills for active exploration: observing, recording, describing, questioning, explaining, and/or drawing conclusions.
- A5-S.2b** – Demonstrate skills for collecting and representing data.
- A5-S.3** – Use tools for investigation and experimentation.
- A5-S.4** – Make comparisons based on observations.
- A5-S.5a** – Ask/answer questions about scientific concepts through active exploration.
- A5-S.5b** – Ask/answer questions using scientific terminology and vocabulary.

Social Studies

- A5-SS.1** – Recognize characteristics of self and others.
- A5-SS.2a** – Recognize family structure, roles, and relationships at home.
- A5-SS.2b** – Recognize structure, roles, and relationships in the classroom and in the community.
- A5-SS.3** – Identify and discuss jobs/careers and tools used to perform each.
- A5-SS.4** – Demonstrate awareness of technology and how it affects daily life.
- A5-SS.5** – Begin to show understanding of social structure, rules, and consequences.
- A5-SS.6** – Begin to show understanding of how people affect the environment in positive and negative ways.

Social/Emotional Development

- SE1.1** – Describe characteristics of self and others.
- SE1.2** – Demonstrate self direction by making choices among peers, activities, and materials.
- SE1.3** – Demonstrate confidence by participating in most classroom activities.
- SE1.4** – Stand up for rights much of the time.
- SE1.5** – Respond respectfully to positive and negative feedback from adults most of the time.
- SE2.1** – Follow classroom rules and procedures with reminders.
- SE2.2** – Use classroom materials responsibly, most of the time.
- SE2.3** – Manage transitions positively when told what to expect.
- SE2.4** – Recognize effect on others of own behavior most of the time.
- SE2.5** – Demonstrate with adult guidance simple techniques to solve social problems.
- SE3.1** – Recognize own feelings and describe them some of the time.
- SE3.2** – Develop strategies to express strong emotion with adult help.
- SE3.3** – Express fears and concerns to familiar adult.
- SE3.4** – Show awareness and respond to feelings of others with adult guidance and support.
- SE4.1** – Display emerging social skills of trying to take turns and talk with others during play.
- SE4.2** – Develop friendship with one or two preferred children.
- SE4.3** – Demonstrate strategies to join play group with adult support.
- SE4.4** – Participate in group life of class.
- SE4.5** – Interact easily with familiar adults by engaging in conversations, responding to questions and following direction.